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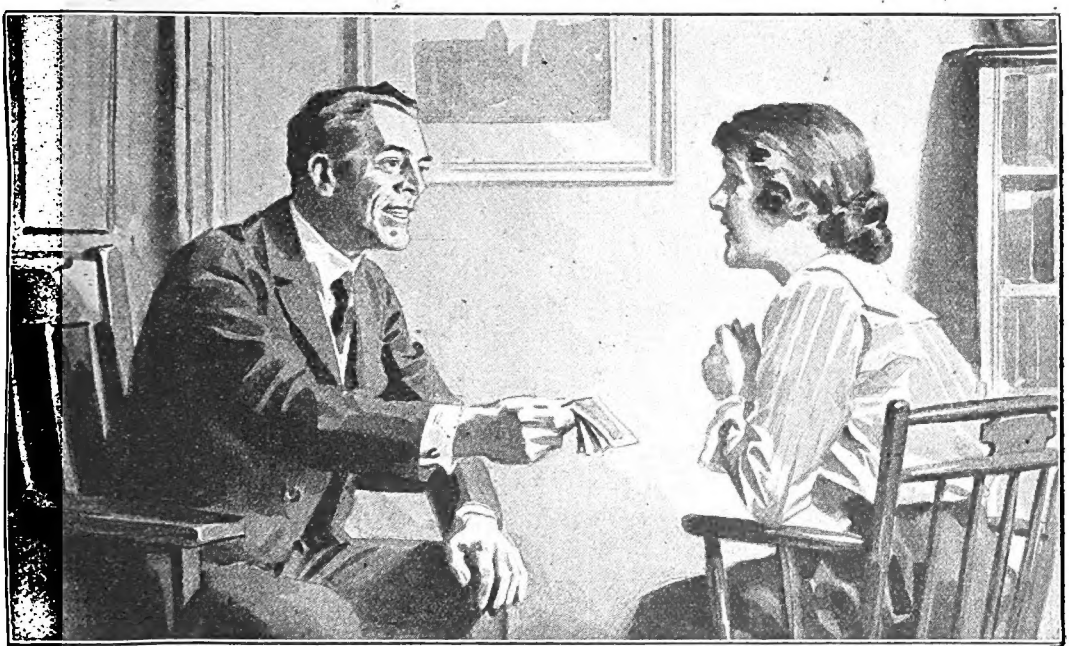

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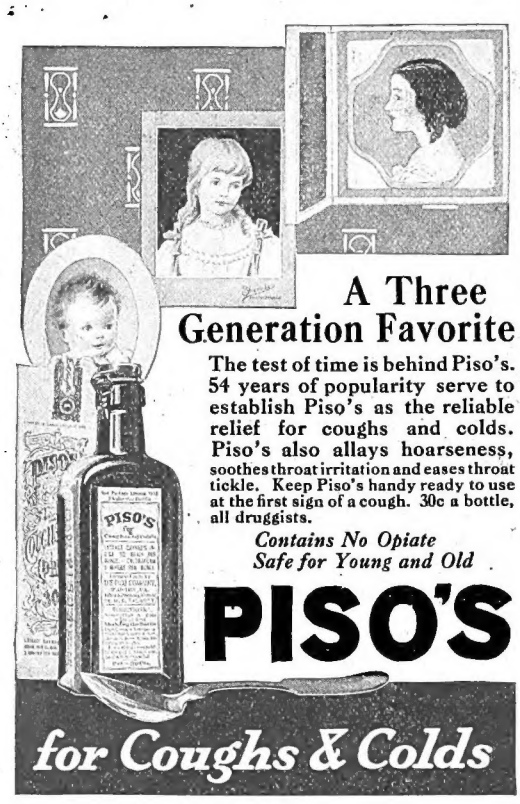

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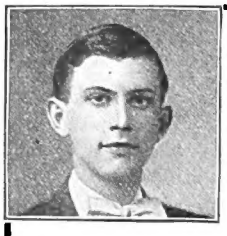

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A tale of pearls and the men who seek them in the South Sea Islands.

For other stories in the coming number turn to The Trail Ahead on page 192

MID-MARCH NUMBER

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March 3, 1919

Adventure

Registered—United States Patent Office.

Vol. 20 No. 5

THE TWO-GUN GIRL

A Complete Novelette by Robert V. Carr

Author of "Triplets Triumphant," "The Survivor," etc.

MISS BILLIE SEAVER wore a short riding-skirt of expensive khaki. The skirt boasted two rather narrow pockets that bulged slightly; they were lined and faced with soft leather. While her garb was for active service, there was no hint of masculine coarseness about her.

True, she wore a man's hat, but its masculinity was annuled by a jeweled pin thrust through its crown. As for her high, stout shoes, if they held any hint of masculinity, it was rendered null and void by recurrent flashes of green silk stockings between their tops and the edge of the khaki skirt. Billie believed that green was restful to the eyes.

Miss Seaver was returning from Beamer, a town on the desert's edge, with several burro-loads of supplies for her devoted father, one Bill Seaver, famed desert-rat and prospecter.

She rode a lively bay pony. Ahead of her plodded the pack-burros.

At times Miss Seaver referred to the pack-burros in language not favored by those who believe a beautiful, radiantly-healthy girl of twenty Summers should loll in a hammock and wait for some masculine gowp to propose marriage to her.

Exclaimed Miss Seaver, with vim and vigor:

"Get along there, Jen, you old lop-eared fool! Jack, move up, or I'll make you think the world has come to an end!"

Of course this was mere mild chiding for slothfulness compared to what her father would have bellowed had he been driving those burros. He would have said— Well, what's the use? It would

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never be printed anyway. But just for fun, take all the profanity of a small war, mix it with the exclamations of a buffalo and a grizzly bear engaged in deadly combat, stir slowly, and bring to a boil over the infernal fires, and gain a vague idea of the remarks of Bill Seaver when engaged in driving burros.

However, the burros responded to Billie's vocal urgings with a perceptible increase of speed. Also, they raised inquiring ears at an approaching horseman. Billie evinced no marked interest in the approaching rider. She was used to meeting desertmen.

The rider reined in and insolently swung his horse across the road between Billie and the pack-burros. She frowned at this maneuver, removed her gloves and tucked them in her belt. Then she proceeded to stare steadily at the man who had dared to block the trail. His swarthy face told her that she was facing a Mexican with, perhaps, more Indian blood in his veins than he cared to admit.

"How far is it to Beamer?" he asked, thumbing his shoebrush mustache, and appraising her beauty with dull, sensual eyes.

"Between four and five miles," she coldly informed him. "Please pull your horse aside and let me pass."

"You in a big hurry?" he asked, with a smirk that held no natural pleasantry. He pushed back the gaudy sombrero he wore. "No use to hurry. Plenty time in this country."

With a flat laugh, he sprang from his horse, and began caressing the ears of her pony. She made no move. Her face was expressionless, but her topaz eyes blazed.

"What is your name?" he questioned softly, as he smoothed the velvety ears of the pony. "You do not care to speak, hey? Then I will speak and tell my name—Manuel Garcia." He glanced, questioningly up and down the road. "You all alone—no one come with you? Too bad pretty girl all alone. I speak good English, hey? Learn it in mission school. Very good mission school. You go to school, hey?"

As he talked his hand crept stealthily back until it rested on the base of the pony's neck. Then he raised his eyes and stared fixedly at her face. The bloomy charms of her countenance touched him with languor. She was white—pure white—alone and defenseless. His nostrils flared a little.

"You are a little girl," he sighed thickly; "and have no friend—no? I will be your friend—your good friend."

He raised his hand from the pony's neck and bent toward her. Instantly blue steel glinted in the sunlight. From those mysterious leather-lined pockets she had wafted a pair of automatics.

Involuntarily the Mexican raised his hands.

"Don't shoot," he whined, the whites of his eyes showing, his mustache bristling like the hackles of a startled dog.

"Back up, *hombre*," she ordered sharply.

Promptly he obeyed.

"Turn around and unbuckle your belt."

He did not move quickly enough to suit her, and her right gun barked, the bullet whizzing through the high crown of his hat.

Frantically he whirled and clawed at his belt-buckle. He dropped the belt as though it were a rattlesnake.

"You might look at your gun," she suggested; and there was much mockery in her tones.

Bang! A bullet shivered the wooden butt of his six-shooter.

"Roll a cigaret, *hombre*," she commanded, "and then turn half around."

He experienced great difficulty in obeying this order. His hands shook so that he wasted much tobacco before the cigaret was made.

"Put it in your mouth and turn the side of your face to me."

What was she about to do? She did not leave him long in doubt.

"Don't move now," she cautioned, as he turned. "I am going to shoot the cigaret from your mouth, so that you will not again bother a white woman. You may have attended mission school, *hombre*, but your higher education has been sadly neglected. All ready now. Remember, don't move!"

Her words of caution were unnecessary. Garcia was a frozen pillar of fear. Every nerve in him was keyed up to the breaking point. Would she never shoot?

Bang! Only a shred of paper and a few crumbs of tobacco remained between his lips.

"Now," she suggested, "if I were you, I would get on my horse and ride away just

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as fast as I could. It is now time to be moving, don't you think?"

Garcia answered her mocking question with frantic leaps toward his horse. As he sprang into the saddle, bullets from the wicked little automatics whizzed past his ears. Bending low over the saddle-horn, he jammed the spurs into his horse and veered off to the right in a wide circle.

He wasted no time in looking back, but sped toward Beamer as though pursued by fiends.

"Foolish man," Billie confided to her pony, "he had to learn his little lesson."

Calmly she removed the magazines of the automatics, and, with deft, sure fingers, pressed home the venomous little cartridges. The guns loaded to her satisfaction, she dropped them in the leather-lined pockets, clucked to her pony, and rode on, composed, perfectly at ease, and with a childish smile lingering about the corners of her mouth.

GARCIA rode into Beamer, a sullen and morose Mexican. He, Manuel Garcia, a man, had been forced to flee before the spiteful bullets of a girl. This was an injury to his honor that must be avenged. Women were inferior creatures—even the women of the lordly white race.

"Yet," quoth Fear, "one may die as quickly from the bite of a female rattlesnake as from the bite of a male. Indeed, thou hadst a narow escape from death, Manuel Garcia."

But who was this beautiful girl who could shoot as though trained and guided by Satan himself? Doubtless there were many in Beamer who knew her. But he must be discreet in his quest for information. The gringos were quick to resent any questions concerning their women.

He sucked in his breath with a little spasm of fear. She might talk, and her words would weave a death-trap for him. She had only to say to the first white man she met—

"A Mexican, Manuel Garcia, halted me on the desert road, and forgot that I was a white woman."

Then, he, Manuel Garcia, would become as one walking in the shadow of death.

What a fool he had been. But, then, she was very beautiful. Why should he not lift his eyes to hers? Had he not been educated in a mission school? What was education for if not to make the brown equal to the white in all things? Did he not speak good English? Could he not repeat many words from the gringo books?

A white woman was as a glimpse of paradise. For a glimpse of paradise a man would dare much.

Then Wisdom, with Fear urging, spoke to him flatly:

"Listen, Manuel Garcia, for I speak the truth. Go among thine own people and choose therefrom a brown-skinned maid. At her roll the languorous eye, and for her strum 'La Paloma.' But, when the white woman passeth, lower thine eyes discreetly. Do thou this that thy days may be long and peaceful."

"No," snarled Primitive Desire, "a woman is a woman. Brown or white, she is still a woman to be won by a man. Thou art the equal of the white man in all things."

Garcia swaggered into a store kept by one of his own race, where he purchased a new hat.

The storekeeper examined the bullet-punctured sombrero curiously.

"For the pleasure of showing the steady hand to those who doubted," he boasted to the storekeeper in Spanish, and with an air of lordly indifference, "I, Manuel Garcia, tossed up the sombrero, and through it a bullet sent."

The storekeeper displayed much admiration of his customer's prowess, apparently deeply impressed. But within he was consumed with regret for not having charged the reckless shooter of hats at least a dollar extra for the new sombrero. Surely, one who shot hats for pleasure could afford to pay well for that sport.

Garcia swaggered from the store, and entered Beamer's principal saloon and gambling-house, "Jack Watts' Place," where he quickly became absorbed in faro.

The goddess of chance smiled on him, and he pocketed his winnings and sought the bar.

A number of his countrymen came in, and grandly he called them up to the bar to drink with him. By mid-afternoon he was drunk. He was not maudlin or noisy, but within him burned the wild fire of baffled desire.

With black imaginings, he recalled the beauty of the mysterious girl. He had

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been cheated; she had cheated him. She had lured him with her beauty, and then had flouted him. He would find her and make her cling to his knees and beg for mercy. Hah, she, a white, woman would beg for mercy at the feet of Manuel Garcia.

Suddenly he turned to a large, florid-faced white man who, elbow on the bar, was surveying him disapprovingly.

"She no good!" he fiercely exclaimed. "No good, I say! Little cat with big eyes—little cat with big eyes—big eyes!"

"Just who you talkin' about?" queried the florid-faced man, with the patience and the easy tolerance of one who had heard much bar-talk.

"Who—who!" bubbled Garcia thickly. "She ride a pony—carry two guns."

The florid-faced man, Jack Watts, the proprietor of the place, threw away his cigar, and straightened up.

"A girl on a bay pony?" he asked softly. Then, to be sure, "A pretty girl, wearin' a man's hat, and drivin' three pack-burros?"

The ominous quality in the voice of his interlocutor was lost on the drunken Mexican.

"*Si, si.* Yes, yes," he hissed. "Little cat—no good!"

"He must mean Bill Seaver's girl," said Watts to his bartender.

"Sure sounds like it," agreed the bartender, tucking in his apron and preparing for action.

Watts struck the Mexican fairly on the point of the jaw, with something like two hundred and thirty pounds back of the blow. Night swooped down on Manuel Garcia and gathered him to her bosom.

"Throw it out," ordered the saloon-keeper coolly; and plucked a fresh cigar from the upper left-hand pocket of his immaculate vest.

The bartender vaulted the bar, and, laying rude hands on the supine form of Manuel Garcia, dragged it to the edge of the sidewalk and rolled it off into the street.

"I don't know but what we had better discourage this Mexican trade," Watts remarked, rubbing his florid face thoughtfully with the palm of one huge hand. "They get queer ideas in their heads. Show that one the gate if he tries to come in again."

For answer the bartender secured the bungstarter, and placed it within easy reach.

When Manuel Garcia regained consciousness, he staggered to his feet, and with slow dragging steps sought Beamer's Mexican section. There, in the shack of a sympathetic countryman, he nursed a swollen jaw and a throbbing head, and brooded over the wrongs inflicted on his race. Gradually he concentrated on the girl. She was the cause of it all. She would be made to suffer—to pay. He, Manuel Garcia, would make her pay.

II

OUT from the barren hills that rimmed the desert plain ran long clay tongues, hidden for the most part by the drift and wash of ages. These clay tongues had an affinity for water, drawing it from sources mysterious—perhaps, from the rivulets and streams of the timbered mountains that raised their frowning ramparts above the low-lying barren hills, or from the clear rivers of a greater range beyond.

Where the tips of the clay tongues thinned beneath the desert sand they exuded water, forming sand-smothered springs. Moisture, rising through the sand, appointed the luxuriant water-weed, the green mesquite with its parasitical mistletoe, and the stately wild palm heralds to announce—

"Here is water!"

Came the coyote, lean and cunning, to dig frantically until he could bury his nose in the wet sand. Then came the Indian to note the work of Friend Coyote. Possessing a fire-hardened stick, the savage proceeded to dig to water. His squaws and children brought boulders from the dry washes to wall up the waterhole, using the moist clay for mortar. Each morning the children filled the *ollas* with water, while the men hunted rabbits and the women busied themselves with the grinding of mesquite beans or the making of pottery.

Then the breath of Destiny blew the Indian into oblivion, but he left behind him, hidden in the sand, *ollas* showing the thumb-marks of his patient squaws, and arrowheads of obsidian, laboriously chipped and fashioned to the required shape and sharpness by hands that were dust long before the ragged, shivering companies fell in for roll-call at Valley Forge.

A white man came, a prospecter who

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hoped to find gold in the desert hills. His keen eyes noted the pottery fragments and the arrowheads.

"Here," he deduced, "Indians have camped. Where they have camped there is water."

The green mesquite and the stately wild palms proved to him the correctness of his deduction.

From his pack he jerked a short-handled shovel, and in two hours of steady digging he found himself standing in muddy water. His sharp eyes caught the glint of an *olla* rim. Carefully he dug the vessel out, and filled it with roily water. It had not felt the caress of water since an Indian maid filled it a century ago, but the prospector did not think of that. Before he broke camp, he secreted the shapely vessel in some young mesquite, thinking to use it when he returned. But he never returned.

Other prospectors camped at the waterhole, but the *olla* in the mesquite thicket remained undisturbed. Finally, a big, sad-faced man, Bill Seaver, grieving over the death of his wife and seeking the solace of the silent desert, came to the waterhole, now known as Eleven Palms; and with him came his three-year-old daughter, a little inquisitive sprite, dancing here and there, laughing, and talking to herself. She found the ancient *olla*. To please her, Bill filled it with water that she might splash to her heart's content.

For that old *olla* Bill ever afterward held a sentimental attachment. Billie had played with it when she was a baby, and that to him was of far more importance than its age or graceful lines.

When Billie was ten she accidentally broke the *olla;* there remained intact only the bottom part—a bowl with a serrated rim. But Billie promptly decided that she liked the old *olla* better that way. She filled the bowl with water, and studied the serrated shadows of the rim, pretending that they were the shadows of a mountain range in a great lake. To her, every misfortune had its compensation.

Bill Seaver had brought his three-year-old, motherless daughter into the desert because he desired that she become self-reliant and fearless. With the patience of a love that knows no limit, he cared for her as tenderly as any woman. He was her mother, her father, her teacher, her friend. Together, in the silent places, they studied, day after day. He taught her the alphabet by tracing the letters in the desert sand with a greasewood stick. As her mind unfolded, they read good books together. He taught her to handle a gun. She became a dead shot, able to defend herself under any condition. When she was fourteen she knew all, practically, that a thoughtful, observing man would know; and then, for polish, Bill sent her away to school.

Billie's letters during those interminable months of separation were full of references to "that glorious day" when she would return "to daddy and the dear old desert."

At last she telegraphed him:

Will start home in a week.

But Bill had another plan that he felt would give the finishing touches to Billie's education. He proposed that they circle the globe. He had a fat bank-account, and they would travel in comfort, see all there was to be seen, and then return to the solitude they both loved.

Her reply was:

Anything, anywhere, just so I am with you. Million loves. BILLIE.

"Huh," mused Bill, with a fond grin, as he read the message, "it doesn't look as though that little son-of-a-gun hated her father."

New York — London — Paris — Rome — Cairo—Calcutta — Hong-kong — Manila — Tokio — Honolulu — San Francisco — Los Angeles — Beamer—the desert — and now Eleven Palms in the distance.

A FEW hours after her clash with the Mexican, and shortly before sundown, Billie rode through the mesquite that encircled the Eleven Palms waterhole, and unsaddled her pony and unpacked the burros. After watering the animals, she picketed the pony, and turned the burros loose. The jacks, having a foolish affection for the saddle-horse, would not stray far away.

She disappeared in the mesquite, and presently returned with the ancient *olla* which she set in its old place of honor by the waterhole. She then brought forth some cooking utensils, a shovel, and two strips of iron from a hiding-place in the thorny brush. She dug a fireplace in a sloping

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bank near the waterhole, and placed the iron strips across the little excavation.

She then turned her attention to two galvanized iron mess-boxes, inventions of her father, which had formed the pack of one burro. Divided into compartments, these boxes were secure against the invasion of the persistent red ant, and were dust and water proof. She raised both lids, resting the lid of one box on the corner of the other that it might serve as a kitchen table.

Water for the coffee, and then a fire beneath the iron strips. She waited until the water boiled and then tossed in a spoonful of coffee.

A tenderloin steak, selected for her by the Beamer butcher, was next in order. She greased the frying-pan with a strip of bacon, sprinkled it liberally with salt, and soon the steak was sending forth a delectable odor.

An inquisitive coyote, prowling near, caught a whiff of the frying meat. He wrinkled his muzzle delicately, and slipped through the mesquite to investigate the cause of that enticing scent.

Billie saw the desert-rover peering at her through the low-hanging mesquite boughs. She laughed; and, at that inexplicable sound, the coyote retreated with magical suddenness. Later, with long-drawn quavers and shrill yappings, he complained to his listening brethren of the invasion of the waterhole by one of those beings whose habit it was to carry sticks that spoke with voices of thunder.

When the supper dishes were washed, she spread a canvas strip out on the clean sand. On this she spread her blanket. Beneath one corner of the blanket she placed her automatics.

Near the foot of the bed she built an Indian fire, pointing the sticks toward the center, to push them in as they burned.

Like some dreaming priestess she sat before the little fire, mind and heart tranquil, undisturbed by envious thoughts, untroubled by the harsh dictates of conventionality, unafraid, and as content as any society bud in her scented boudoir.

Beyond the radius of the fire the mesquite loomed, a wall draped with black velvet, a dark barrier that the groping fingers of firelight tried in vain to touch and solve the mystery thereof.

A light breeze brought to the dreaming girl the aromatic odors of desert shrub and bloom. A bird chirruped sleepily in a nearby palm. Silence.

Slowly she drew off her shoes, and wiggled her silk-incased toes at the friendly fire. Presently she scooped up a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers on the flames. Bravely the little fire fought for its life, sputtering and snapping valorously, but the sand trickling through those slim fingers gradually conquered it. With a final splutter, it drew in its magic circle of light, and died.

She lay down and drew the blanket over her. For her there was no dread of the long, still night, no fear, no superstition. This mesquite-encircled camp was merely a place in the desert she had known since childhood. She snuggled down to sleep.

Dawn. Glowing bronze cloud-islands afloat in the blue depths of the eastern sky. A red glow along the horizon that stains the edges of the bronze islands with crimson.

The little people of the desert are early risers. Long before the red rim of the sun shows above the horizon, the hummingbirds are darting through the mesquite, the bees are droning over the waterholes, and the feet of the rabbits, rats and lizards are writing little morning stories in the sand.

Billie tossed aside her blanket, sprang to her feet, and made obeisance to the rising sun.

"Ho, ho!" she laughed. "Good morning, Sol! Thank you, kind sir, for awakening me."

And she threw a kiss at the lover of the world.

She filled the old *olla* with water, and performed her morning ablutions with much splashing, since it does not matter if one spills water on the desert floor.

She was soon ready for the trail. As she rode forth from the palms, a sudden wild appreciation of the pure joy of living surged up within her. She wanted to laugh, to sing, to shout at the top of her voice. As there was no law against such demonstrations in the desert, she proceeded to release her pent-up joy. She laughed, she sang, she shouted. She was young and life was good.

A road-runner tipped his tail insolently at the little caravan. She waved her hand at the beautiful bird, calling out cheerily—

"Good morning, Mr. High-stepper."

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A jack-rabbit sprang frantically from his nest beneath a squatty burro bush, and after him she called greetings and felicitations on his speed.

She turned her pony aside to save the life of a horned toad.

"Better get out of the way, Little Homeliness," she advised.

Little Homeliness cocked his head, and turned up one eye at her; then in sudden panic darted into shelter.

A sidewinder, however, was not favored with such friendly greetings. She drew an automatic as he rattled at her from the shade of a greasewood.

"I don't like to do this," she murmured, "but you might bite some one."

One shot sufficed. With a little sigh she rode on.

Then, as was often her habit, her real self drew back into some mysterious shadow and watched that which laughed and sang and answered to the name of Billie. Her real self smiled sympathetically as the joyous Billie broke into song, but frowned a little dubiously at the words.

"My lover is a handsome boy,
His eyes are bold and clear;
He comes to me on Summer nights,
And whispers words so dear——"

Softly, and with a golden note of sorrow—

"And whispers words so dear—so dear—so dear."

III

"I'VE found it," announced the "Deacon" guardedly. "Move over till I spill the glad tidings."

The "Parson" made room for the Deacon, but pretended to be looking at the scenery. His co-worker talked rapidly in low tones.

"A small-town hick by the name of Ethelbert Binns. Got next to him in the chair-car. He's carrying a lunch, but no baggage. I stalled as soon as I saw him, and dropped one of our cards—'Repent before it's too late.' He picked up the card and his face agreed with it. I was moving slow, and he calls to me and back I go. The rest was easy enough.

"I showed him several of the cards, 'Sinner, stop, look and listen,' and 'The devil never sleeps,' and 'How do you know but what you'll be dead tomorrow and then what?' He took them all in like they tasted good to him.

"I give him the old stuff about being on my way to Los to hold a series of meetings. Put it up to him strong that I wanted him to come to my meetings. He said he would, and then began to unfold his past life. He must have a fair wad."

"How'd you figger that?" the Parson shot out of one corner of his mouth.

"Why, naturally he opened up like a fire-station door. Told me about his old man being one of the leading lights of some two-by-four burg where everybody watches everybody else to keep 'em from doing the things they'd like to do themselves if they had the nerve. The old man croaks and leaves this curio and his mother. They have enough to live on if they go easy, but some kind brother, with a letter of introduction, comes along and sells the widow a piece of scenery he doesn't own.

"That makes it necessary for Ethelbert to jar loose from maw, taking with him what money he had saved working for his papa. He's never been out in the world before, and is headed for his uncle—a John Watts at Beamer. Showed me a letter from his uncle. Uncle promises him a job as a watchman in his bank, although that's the first time I ever heard a watchman called a 'lookout.'"

"Maybe this uncle of his don't want to hurt his relations' feelings," opined the Parson. "I've heard about some of these old-timers writing their folks about being in the 'banking business.' One sharp I know of, who was sticking up stages right along, wrote his maw that he was helping in some uplift work. He was—helping 'em to uplift their hands."

The Parson smiled a fox smile. The Deacon laughed carefully, as though he feared to annoy his face with strange wrinkles.

"This Ethelbert," the Deacon continued, "has never been around much. Maw raised him by hand. He does not drink, use tobacco, and he thinks women are men's ruination. This sounds queer when his mother was a woman, but that's his line of talk."

"I know that kind;" sneered the Parson, "They're like sheep made only to blat and grow wool." Impatiently he added: "Go on and finish. You're too longwinded."

"Maybe I am," the Deacon meekly admitted. "Maybe I do scatter, but this gazob got me going. He thinks he's better than other people."

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"The less they know the more they pull that stuff," said the Parson.

"Uh-huh, you're right. But I think I've spotted a dippy one. What real man would be proud of never having no fun, and him twenty-five years old? He's as pure as the dew on the lily. I think he's a idiot. I promised my old dad I would never trim a fool, or hit a cripple."

"Money is not crazy," snapped the Parson. "I don't care what he is or what he thinks. How much do you think he is carrying?"

"Around five hundred. He was asking me about land in California; said he'd read where men had cleaned up big on buying land. As a feeler, I told him some land in California run five hundred an acre. He looked a little scared at that figure, but said he might buy an acre. That proved to me that he was carrying around five hundred dollars. I know he's got it on him by the way he fusses with his clothes."

"Go get him, then," ordered the Parson. "I'll get him used to eating out of my hand. We'll have to get him off the train. Maybe we can work it from Gila. Con tells me we side-track there twenty minutes."

"No, I think you'd better stay hid," advised the Deacon. "I believe this bird will fall for the old fake telegram. I had it in mind when I was talking to him. He has never seen his uncle and don't know what he looks like."

"That fixes it, then," said the Parson briskly. "You plant the telegram in his seat. I'll be ready to drop off at Gila. I'll be the uncle and I'll get the money."

"It might work," the Deacon commented hopefully. "He's running back and forth with his little folding-cup to the water-cooler, and that will let me plant the message. Chances are the boob has never got a telegram in his life. I'll word the message so he won't ask the con any questions."

Thus it came to pass that Ethelbert Binns, on returning from a trip to the water-cooler, noticed a yellow envelop bearing his name reposing in his seat. He picked it up and opened it.

It read:

Get off at Gila and meet me. I will take you to my gold mine and make you boss. Say nothing to any man about this as it will mean the loss of the gold mine if you speak.

UNCLE JOHN.

Ethelbert, as the Deacon had surmised, had never before received a telegram. The fact that the message was written in script instead of being typed raised no suspicion in his mind. Carefully he folded the message and carefully he put it in his inside vest pocket. Having no baggage, he had only to walk a few feet to the coach door, and step off the train when the brakeman informed him—

"Yep, this is Hee-la."

"Uncle John," with his hat pulled down over his eyes, received Ethelbert with open arms, but wasted no time with affectionate greetings.

"Hurry," hissed the mysterious uncle. "I don't want nobody to see us."

He seized Ethelbert's arm, and fairly dragged him into the darkness. Pushing him ahead, he deliberately whisked off the victim's hat.

"Never mind your hat," he whispered. "I did it accidentally. I'll get you a new one."

They descended into a great wash that led away from the railroad. Vaguely Ethelbert wondered at Gila's lack of streets of buildings.

Then something descended on the hatless head of Ethelbert Binns, and the universe crashed to ruin and black oblivion.

ETHELBERT awoke with pain-fiends beating tom-toms, pounding anvils, and filing saws within his skull.

With groans that arose from the depths of his being, he managed to gain his feet. He staggered down the wash, and turned into a tributary that led back into the open desert.

The thought of fire came to him, and he halted and searched his pockets for matches, which he sometimes used as toothpicks. Then it was that he discovered the loss of his money which he had carried pinned to the nether portion of his shirt.

A little glimmer of intelligence came to him. A place called Gila—his uncle—gold mine — darkness — oblivion — money gone.

Then, what to him was the terrible truth dawned on him. His uncle had hit him on the head with a rock or club and robbed him. Yes, that was it. His mother had always said that Uncle John was a little wild.

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It was almost too frightful to contemplate. And he could make no complaint. To brand his uncle as a near-murderer and thief would cause his mother to perish with shame. No, he must endure all in silence. He must never let the world know that he had an uncle who would lure a trusting nephew from a train, bang him on the head, and take his last dollar.

He moaned a little and staggered on. When the dawn came he was miles from the railroad.

Ethelbert, though the cogs of his mentality were somewhat gummed, saw that about all there was to do in such a country was to walk out of it. There seemed to be some low-lying hills in the distance. He could see no reason for walking unless he could be assured that he was going somewhere. He had to have an objective that he could see. Perhaps there was water in those distant hills. That thought helped some.

By noon he had ceased to give his murderous and thieving uncle mind-room. Water was the subject of his thought—rivers of water. It was not a hot day from a desert viewpoint, but Ethelbert was green and soft and the direct rays of the sun sapped his energy.

To him it seemed a day belched up by Hades. The Parson had used a man-sized blackjack in giving him that dreamland excursion, and on the young man's head was what is commonly termed a "goose egg." Over the "goose egg" he wore his coat shawl-fashion to shield the quivering lump from the sun.

As he lurched forward toward the distant hills, he became hysterically peevish. Why should such a country be permitted to exist—a country with no water, no trees, no grass?

He was conscious of being goaded. If he sat down, thirst and hunger closed in on him. If he staggered on, weariness made him faint and sick. If he tried to think, there was nothing save water to think about. If he thought about water, his thirst and misery increased, and there came to him tantalizing memories of cool beakers of lemonade in the safe precincts of the home town drug-store.

Each soft tendril of hope he sent out looking for something to support it received a cruel snip from the desert. He had been walking for hours—days—weeks—months toward those hills and yet they seemed no nearer. No hope, no hope, no hope!

Night came, and with it the twinkle of a distant fire. Ethelbert would have shouted for joy had he dared spare the energy. With a great effort he quickened his pace. It seemed to him an eternity before he could see figures around the fire. He was not conscious of his wide staggering steps; he only knew that here were human beings—water—safety.

Out of the gloom he lurched into the circle of firelight. Now that he was with his kind, he gave up and fell on his hands and knees. The desert had treated him tenderly, but he thought he had passed across the range of Satan, and a man probably suffers as much from what he thinks as from what he actually experiences.

He was conscious of great arms lifting him to his feet and half-carrying him to a blanket spread out on the ground. Then he felt the blessed water on his tongue. He wanted water—oceans of it, but powerful hands restrained him. In time he found that he could see clearly.

At his side knelt a big man, with a kindly, humorous face. Then he turned his head a little and beheld a girl looking down at him—a marvelously beautiful girl with eyes like the man's, steady, and with a little smile in them.

He sat up and looked himself over. Gradually he became aware that he was wearing his shirt Chinese fashion. True to his bringing up, he made a frantic effort to tuck the shameless garment inside his trousers. Faintly he heard the girl laugh. And his soul cringed under the drawling comment of the man—

"Billie, we've got something here I've heard of but never have seen—a modest man." Gravely he interrogated Ethelbert: "Do you usually travel this way—with your shirt out? I've heard that that style is considered a little ahead of the times."

"I had my money pinned on—" Ethelbert began babbling; and then, recalling his dastardly uncle, firmly shut his mouth.

"Don't worry," soothed Bill. "We don't want to know any more than you want to tell us."

And thus to the Seaver camp came Ethelbert Binns, a stall-fed young man, penniless, friendless, but with his morals intact.

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IV

ETHELBERT speedily recovered from his harsh experience under the ministrations of Bill Seaver and—and—he stuttered mentally when he thought of her—Billie. That masculine cognomen seemed a sacrilege to him. Yet it never occurred to him that "Ethelbert" sounded a trifle bonbonish for a he-man.

Ethelbert groped through the fog that hung low over his mind for some Binns' reason for that camp amid wild palms and mesquite. Of course he made no effort to discover a Seaver reason. He could not quite understand why people—sane people—would want to live out there when they could just as well live in town, and enjoy the comforts of life. He was unable, however, to name the comforts of civilized life that the Seavers did not possess.

Billie's tent puzzled him, and he walked over to investigate. He gaped at the rich Navajo rugs spread over the canvas floor, the odd little cot, the chairs, and the specially constructed folding dresser on which reposed various toilet articles. He was quite surprized to note a trunk, fitted with shelves, and made to serve as a bookcase. And there was another trunk which was constructed to hold phonograph records.

As he peered into the tent, Bill called to him.

"Come here, and sit down," the prospecter invited. "I want to talk to you."

As Ethelbert seated himself, the big prospecter smiled paternally.

"What I have to say has no sting to it," he began in his kindly way. "I never go near Billie's tent or enter it unless she invites me. That is her house, and it is not customary to look into a house just because the front door is open."

Ethelbert gulped and blushed.

"I must say," Bill went on, apparently oblivious to Ethelbert's confusion, "that Billie called my attention to you last night—gave me quite a talk. Seems that you wandered off a train somewhere and drifted in here. No money and no friends. I thought of sending you to Beamer, and letting it go at that, but Billie argued that you ought to stay out here and become desert-wise. Beyond that I don't know what she has planned for you. Anyway, if you stay, you're under her orders. I'm a fair-minded man, and you will share everything with us as long as you stay."

Ethelbert felt that his mouth was full of words, and made an effort to speak, but Bill frowned in such a menacing manner that the young man swallowed his mouthful of words and preserved a tight silence.

"You see," Bill rambled on, as though talking to himself, "there are things I know without being told. I've seen so much of the human animal that I know most of his points. Take you, for example. Your name tells me the story. Binns is common—sounds like a part of a barn or something—but Ethelbert is fair and fancy. Whoever gave you that name was straining for a moonbeam with a garden rake. And you kept that name—Ethel-bert. Your head hasn't hardened yet or you would have pared your name down to Bert.

"I'm a prospecter, and I'm always looking for signs. The signs I see on you are those that wouldn't pay for me to mill. But Billie thinks there's a paying vein in you. Maybe there is for her—I don't know.

"You're what I've been trying to get away from all my life. I know every idea you ever had, and I know mighty little at that. I know how you've been raised, and all your views. I don't hate you, Ethelbert, but count you in with the hardship of living. Billie says she wants to study you. For her I'll suffer anything."

Ethelbert made a pitiful effort to speak, but Bill raised a huge, silencing hand.

"Keep still," he commanded kindly. "I know what you'd say under any circumstances, and so there's no use for you to speak. Perhaps you'll think me a little overbearing and hard, but that makes no difference. What you think of me makes no difference. Every minute I put up with you makes you owe me something. Not money, for we're not thinking of money, but the right to insist that you don't try to unload any of your ideas on me.

"Here's why my girl and I stick to the desert. We want to keep away from people made by machinery, turned out by the million, wearing the same kind of clothes, the same-sized hats, thinking the same thoughts, and eating the same brand of mush. You're one of those machine-made humans, Ethelbert. Billie claims to see something in you. Maybe there is for her, but not for me. You are welcome to stay here; in fact you'll have to stay if Billie says so. But don't talk to me about

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what you think is right or what you think is wrong. That's all, and with nothing but kindness. Such is the layout, Ethelbert."

The audience was at an end. Bill arose and joined his daughter at the spring. She was modeling a little clay figure. He sprawled out on the salt grass and lighted his pipe.

"What are you doing?" he rumbled.

"Making a man out of mud." Mysteriously.

Bill pondered her answer for several moments.

"Looks like Ethel-bert," he finally drawled.

"It is Ethelbert," she said; and with deft, sure fingers gave the little figure several finishing pats. "There, he's all ready to be dried."

Bill pretended deep and solemn interest.

"What are you going to do with him when he's dried?"

"Well, daddy," she confessed, giving him a wicked side glance, "that's a hard question to answer. But, if you'll tell me what God does with us after we're dried, I'll tell you what I propose doing with Ethelbert after he's dried."

Bill grinned at her, his eyes full of worshipful admiration.

"You're a cute little son-of-a-gun," he murmured.

She rewarded him with a smile of childish innocence.

"You know, daddy, you are a very wise man, but there are many things you have not learned."

Bill gave his daughter almost a diffident look.

"Well, anyway," he confessed weakly, "I told Ethel-bert that you wanted to look him over, and——"

Billie sprang to her feet, and pointed a muddy accusing finger at her father.

"Mister Daddy Seaver," she reproached, with as much anger as she was capable of directing toward the being that she loved better than her life, "you didn't tell him that?"

Bill threw up his hand and dodged, pretending that he expected her to strike him.

"Oh, you've just spoiled everything!" she cried. "Surely you should know that I can do nothing with him if he knows that he is—" she glanced down at the clay figure—"being modeled."

Bill pretended great relief.

"Don't worry, then," he soothed. "How can he know when he knows nothing to start with?"

This seemed to mollify her.

"I guess I'll take him hunting," she said thoughtfully.

"Uh-huh," Bill agreed. "Good idea. But be careful and don't shoot him for a jack-rabbit. I swear he looks like one—same expression."

Billie ignored her father's remarks. She picked up the clay figure and gave it to him.

"You can have that," she told him softly. "It's a present. Don't say naughty words to it. Treat it kindly, and remember it is made of clay."

She skipped up the trail to Ethelbert.

Very carefully Bill laid the figure on the pile of clay from which Billie's deft fingers had evoked it; and brushed his hands. The action was significant. He refused to have anything to do with the modeling of Ethelbert.

"Let's go hunting," Billie suggested, as she danced up to Ethelbert who had remained in a state of semi-coma following Bill's talk.

She came close to him, and he felt a distinct shock. He tried to think of other girls he had known, but memory refused to function.

In her presence, he found it impossible to think of any other human being. How heavy her hair was, and how wonderful were those golden glints in it. Even that little procession of freckles across the bridge of her nose was beautiful. He admitted without a struggle that there was nothing about her appearance that could be improved.

"Come on," she urged, "we'll take the twenty-two and go hunting."

"All right," he gulped, "just as you say."

WHEN they were about a mile from camp, an odd figure suddenly bobbed up above a clump of greasewood and gave vent to a shrill whistle.

"Oh, there's 'Happy Jack,'" exclaimed Billie with childish delight; and blew an answering blast on her fingers.

Happy Jack came leaping and skylarking. He was clad in overalls and a sleeveless undershirt. His face and arms were tanned to a rich brown. He had lived the fifteen years of his life in the desert.

Billie presented Mr. Ethelbert Binns,

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and Happy shook his hand energetically. Then, without warning, the boy turned and gave Billie a playful open-handed smack between the shoulder blades.

She dropped her rifle and flew at him. Happy grabbed her and set her down in the sand. She kicked and pinched him. Finally she threw a handful of sand in his face. He pretended to be knocked out; he reeled and tottered and finally fell. Billie crawled to him on her hands and knees, and calmly sat down on him.

"Why, Miss Seaver!" Ethelbert managed to gasp.

She looked up at him wickedly. Happy seemed resigned to his fate. He reached out and secured a blade of bunch grass and chewed it calmly.

Ethelbert felt that he must reprove her. Of course there was the shadow of his murderous, thieving uncle to check condemnation. As long as he was the nephew of a near-murderer and thief he could not condemn, but he might guide, he might point out the right path. Doubtless she was unaware that her actions were highly improper. She was probably ignorant of the rules of maidenly conduct.

"It is not nice," he bleated, "for a young lady to sit on a young man."

Happy promptly squirmed out from under Billie, and the next moment Ethelbert was confronting a very hostile young desert-rat.

"Who are you to tell Billie what to do?" snarled the boy.

Ethelbert raised his brows, and tried to appear superior. He would not bandy words with this young savage.

Happy was only fifteen, but he was hard and lean, and there was a wild-cat gleam in his eye. Ethelbert was much heavier, and ten years older.

He ignored the boy, and addressed Billie with marked primness—

"I have said what I believe to be right."

Billie did not reply. Her attitude seemed to please Happy, for he sneered in Ethelbert's face:

"You're a mush-head."

Ethelbert drew himself up with what he imagined was quiet dignity.

"I'll thank you, young man," he said loftily, "to keep your remarks to yourself."

"You can't tell me to shut up," yelled Happy, working himself into a fighting rage. "I don't care if you're as big as a house, you can't make me shut up!"

He thrust out his jaw and craned his neck like a young fighting-cock.

"I have had quite enough of this," Ethelbert grandly announced; and pushed Happy back.

In a flash Ethelbert found his hands full of fighting boy. It were as though he had plucked a wild-cat from a limb, expecting to toss it away carelessly.

Happy was all over Ethelbert in a moment. Ethelbert lost his balance and they went down in a scrambling, clawing heap. Happy managed to get in a couple of blows on Ethelbert's nose. This caused Ethelbert to become provoked. He must do something, he thought. It hurt terribly to be hit on the nose. He managed to roll Happy over and bear him down with sheer weight.

Happy got Ethelbert's thumb in his mouth, and set his sharp, strong teeth in deep. Ethelbert groaned. This was awful.

Now Billie was standing over them.

"You're hurting Mr. Binns," she shrilled. "Stop it, Happy. Stop biting him, I say!"

Happy released Ethelbert's thumb.

"Get up, both of you," ordered the girl.

Ethelbert contrived to free himself of Happy, who had something of the nature of a sand-bur. The boy sneered up at his late antagonist.

"I pretty near had you licked," he jeered.

"That will do from you now, Happy," Billie snapped. "Go on about your business, and, if you say a word about this, I will never speak to you again."

Meekly Happy arose and started away. It was plain that Billie's sharp words had cut him to the quick.

She ran after him, and put her arm around him.

"I did not mean to hurt your feelings, Happy," she said, contrite and humble. "We'll always be good friends."

Happy dug a little grave in the sand with the toe of his hob-nailed shoe.

"Is it all right now?" she quavered.

His answer was to reach around himself and jerk one of her tawny braids. She pretended to be greatly startled, and pushed him aside. He struck a burro bush, lost his balance, and fell sprawling.

"Ow!" he yelled. "Sticker in my shoulder!"

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"My, I bet it hurts!" Billie commiserated, as she helped him to his feet.

"Not much," he remarked with studied indifference. "Jerk it out."

He was suffering fine torture; a ball-cactus stuck in the shoulder muscles.

Billie took a couple of sticks and jerked the spiny ball from the cringing flesh. Some of the inch-long barbs remained in the flesh, and Billie insisted that Happy remove his shirt. She even helped him to remove the garment. The boy stood forth like a young god, a trickle of crimson down his white back. He stared at Ethelbert with an unblinking eagle gaze, and did not wince as Billie jerked out the cruel thorns.

"Now," she told him, "they're all out. You better go now, Happy. And please do not say anything about your trouble with Mr. Binns."

Happy drew on his shirt, and with a muttered, "Good-by," went his way through the greasewood aisles.

The girl turned to Ethelbert who was nursing his nose.

"What's the matter?" she asked "You act as though you were suffering."

"My nose is certainly broken," he whined. "I must get some place where there is water."

"Oh, I suppose so," she returned indifferently. "I don't know what you'd do if you were really hurt. Come on, you're not suffering. Lucky for you that Happy was only a boy, or you'd know by this time what real suffering was. When you meet a man, you may have something to think about."

"Meet a man," echoed Ethelbert, dumbfounded, and forgetting to hold his nose. "What man—who?"

"Oh, you'll meet plenty of men before you're many weeks older," she replied, with that same chilling indifference.

Ethelbert tried to speak, but his nose was bleeding and one can not talk impressively with an incarmined nose.

"Here," she said, picking up a small, flat rock. "Hold this under your upper lip. It will stop nosebleed. A little bloodletting won't hurt you."

With blind faith he clamped the pebble between his upper lip and his teeth. Presently his nose ceased bleeding, and he followed her as she slipped along, alert and watchful, gun at the ready.

A jack-rabbit bounded from his nest beneath a burro bush, and startled Ethelbert nearly out of his wits. Billie whirled and shot the zigzagging rabbit.

Ethelbert, at her commanding gesture, started off to retrieve the jack-rabbit, but had walked only a few steps when something squirmed out from beneath his feet, and a dry buzzing chilled the marrow in his bones. Scarcely a pace from his feet was a rattlesnake!

"A snake—a snake!" he chattered. "Come—come! A snake—a snake!"

"So I see," commented Billie in matter-of-fact tones, as she sauntered up. "A sidewinder. Want to look at him?"

Ethelbert was shivering like a frightened horse.

"Get down and take a good look at him," she drawled. "He can't hurt you."

She dropped the butt of her rifle on the snake, and held him.

Here was a situation that Ethelbert could not meet with sermons on propriety. Some latent manhood squirmed within him. Apparently she was not afraid of snakes, and he, a man, was supposed to be superior to a woman. He started toward the snake, and she promptly released it. Desperate and wild, the sidewinder hitched himself toward the man.

With a wild chattering cry Ethelbert sprang high in the air. As he landed on his knees in some bunch-grass, he heard Billie's rifle crack. She had shot the snake—he was safe. Quivering and shuddering, he returned to review the remains.

"You're quite an athlete," she observed, with fine sarcasm. "You must hold a lot of medals for high jumping. Don't you know that it is not good form to jump all over the scenery whenever you see a little sidewinder?"

"But the bite of a rattlesnake is deadly!" he panted. "People who are bitten by them die quickly."

"I suppose so," she replied, with a mocking light in her topaz eyes. "People die with old age, too, and fall down stairs and crack their heads, and choke to death on fish bones. There is nothing new about dying; they're doing it every day, Ethelbert. You must get over that idea of dying, and learn something about living."

Ethelbert was stunned. All the good little speeches coiled up in his mind remained coiled. Something was wrong here. He could not get action on anything. She

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was a girl, and yet was not afraid of snakes. She was a girl, and yet dared to romp with a young man. She was a girl, and yet had the power to say things that strained his mind to think about.

Certainly she was right about people dying every day. Still, there was a being known as Ethelbert who did not want to die—who was afraid to die. He felt baffled. If she had only displayed some fear of the snake, he might have killed it with rocks. That was what was wrong; he would have acted differently had she flung herself on his protection. Then he could have said—

"Never mind, little girl, I'll not let the snake hurt you."

Robbed of the privilege of being a hero, he was like a bagpipe without wind. There was nothing left except to mount the pedestal of self-righteousness. At least his had been a spotless life.

"What's the matter?" she flung at him suddenly. "Wake up, Ethelbert, you're walking in your sleep. That's why you get bumped. You're a mental somnambulist."

V

WHEN Billie and Ethelbert returned to camp, the latter dragging two jack-rabbits that might easily have been mistaken for young burros, they found that a Mr. Abner Buld, a mining expert from San Francisco, had arrived to inspect a group of Bill's mining claims. Billie immediately displayed marked interest in Buld. Ethelbert, noting this marked interest, immediately saw many things about the mining expert of which he disapproved.

He was a brute, Ethelbert decided, a thick-necked brute with a melon-shaped head, rhinoceros eyes, and a thick, sticky, perspiring hand. Especially did Ethelbert dislike the way Buld looked at Billie.

At the supper-table Billie was most considerate of the wants of Mr. Buld. Something like a small vulture was now gnawing at Ethelbert's vitals. He even entertained thoughts of violence as he contemplated Buld's thick neck. No, one could not choke Buld. To make any impression on Buld, one would have to use a club or a sledge-hammer. A sledge-hammer would fix him all right. How could Billie endure the middle-aged hog?

After supper Billie got out the phonograph and played a number of records for Mr. Buld. Ethelbert fumed and fretted in the background.

Bill, having decided that he did not care to sell his mining property to the group of San Francisco capitalists which Buld represented, made no effort to attract the expert's attention. Smiling blandly to himself, he wandered off in the desert to smoke and ruminate.

Billie left nothing undone to convince Mr. Buld that he was the guest of honor. The mining expert responded heavily. He even attempted to sing, giving vent to a noise that resembled the vocal efforts of a seal calling for fish. He was convinced that he had made a deep impression on this maid of the desert. The mining claims could wait. Even when Bill informed him that he had decided not to sell the claims, the mining expert lingered.

Buld, having invaded the desert with an automobile, proceeded to take Billie on numerous joy-rides. He became as playful as a baby elephant, and took to calling her "little girl."

Ethelbert was left to secure what little comfort and solace Pierre, the cook, had to offer.

But what drove Ethelbert to the point of madness was the way that Billie took Buld's arm when they started on a little walk one balmy evening. She seemed to rely on Buld to protect her. She did not reprove him when Buld patted the little hand resting on his arm.

Later, a prospecter rode into camp with mail for Bill, as well as a letter for Abner Buld. Ethelbert received the mail, and on the Buld letter he noted, with a horrified gasp, the legend, "Return to Mrs. Abner Buld." He read no further—he couldn't; the address to him was a blur.

Just as he had thought all along—something was wrong. So this low brute was married, and poor, innocent Billie did not know it. The unprincipled man was deceiving her. Even now they were together out there in the desert. Buld was probably making love to her right now. It must be stopped.

Hurriedly Ethelbert gave Pierre the letters, and dashed from camp.

"Crazy in the head," commented Pierre.

A few moments later Bill returned to camp, and noted the letter for Buld as well

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as the legend, "Return to Mrs. Abner Buld." But he flew into no terrible rage. He merely grinned, and muttered, "Number eleven hundred and forty-four," meaning that Buld was his little daughter's eleven hundred and forty-fourth conquest. If Buld chose to make a fool of himself, that was his business. Billie, he knew, was entirely capable of dominating any possible situation that might arise. If it amused her to flirt with Buld, that was her affair.

Ethelbert found Buld actually attempting to recite poetry to Billie. He was declaiming haltingly:

"Your smile to me, my pretty maid,
Is like heaven—no, paradise,
And every night—every night—I lay awake,
And dream of your—of your eyes—no, dear eyes."

It was a terrible effort, even Ethelbert realized that. But he must not forget his mission.

"I have a few words to say to you, Mr. Buld," he announced, in a high, excited voice.

Buld turned, enraged at the interruption.

"What do you mean by butting in here?" he rumbled.

"That is all right what I mean," Ethelbert countered, with a faint show of dignity, "but I think you should be ashamed of yourself. You are a married man, and have no right——"

"Why, Mr. Buld!" exclaimed Billie. "How could you be so thoughtless as to forget to tell me that you were married? How many children have you?"

"Six—no, five," Buld blabbered, badly rattled.

"Five little Bulds," she recited in monotonous tones. "Just think of it—five little Bulds all in a row."

Buld now turned his entire attention to Ethelbert. Here was a male creature that had intruded. A black rage seethed and bubbled within him.

"You cheap buttinsky," he growled, thrusting his jaw, covered with black stubble, within a hand's breadth of Ethelbert's face, "you want anything out of me and you'll get it. Tell me, do you want anything out of me?"

To Ethelbert it was most apparent that this creature with the thick neck wanted to fight. At this juncture Buld's heavy hand dropped on his shoulder.

"Heard what I said, didn't yeh?" gritted the father of six—no, five—children. "Want anything out of me?"

Ethelbert now realized that, if he answered in the affirmative, he would have this huge, perspiring hulk of humanity on his hands. Buld would be very heavy, and very hard. Buld would smash him down into the sand and probably walk on him. He had heard of such men as Buld doing just such things. Of course he, Ethelbert Binns, was right; it was sinful for a married man to deceive a girl like Billie. But he could not quite reach the point where he could throw caution—was it caution?—to the winds and bore into Buld.

So his Adam's apple performed some queer antics, as he gulped—

"I do not care to discuss anything with you."

Buld turned to Billie with a triumphant gesture.

"See, the big bluff has nothing to say."

The mining expert hoped to distract attention from his family affairs by centering on his prowess as an intimidator of "buttinskys."

But Billie did not reply. She merely sighed, and gave Ethelbert a sorrowful look.

Her attitude encouraged Buld. Apparently she did not care whether he was married or not. She probably admired a positive, dominant man. So he thrust his jaw a little closer to Ethelbert's face, and rumbled in a deep, menacing voice—

"Be on your way, Ethel."

Ethelbert backed away from that menacing jaw. Buld followed. Ethelbert found that he could not prevail on his feet to remain stationary. He continued backing.

Buld laughed insultingly, and returned to Billie.

"It would be a shame to hit him," he remarked.

"I suppose so," Billie mournfully admitted.

ETHELBERT returned to camp to find that Bill had another guest, a hard-faced man with a pair of blazing blue eyes. Ethelbert was so intent on his own sufferings that he did not hear Bill say—

"This is Rex Lane, an old partner of mine, and Billie's foster-uncle."

"I must tell you, Mr. Seaver," Ethelbert burst out, oblivious to Lane's extended hand. "I must tell you of this man Buld.

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He is a married man, and I do not think it is right the way he is acting with Miss Billie."

Bill winked at Lane, and gave him the details.

"Why didn't you knock him dead?" Lane demanded, his blazing eyes fixed on Ethelbert.

"Sure," Bill laughed, "why didn't you knock him dead?"

"But aren't you going to take some steps to guard your daughter?" Ethelbert almost screamed.

Again Bill winked at Lane.

"You might look our friend Buld over, Rex," he suggested. "I'm getting too old for rough work."

"But, Mr. Seaver——"

"Don't get excited, Ethelbert," Bill soothingly warned him. "If you have appointed yourself Billie's guardian, you should back up your ideas with action."

"That's it exactly," Lane agreed. "You should have landed on him. An idea is no good unless you get action on it. What seemed to be the trouble? Was he too big for you?"

At that moment Billie entered camp, followed by Buld who gave Bill a questioning, anxious glance.

"Oh, Uncle Rex!" she cried; and ran into the prospecter's arms.

"I came three hundred miles to see you," murmured Lane fondly. "Kept putting it off all the time, but finally had a dream about you. I seemed to see you when you were about three, in that little checkered dress I bought you, and you were wearing that sunbonnet bigger than you were, and —well, I just had to come along."

Billie rested her tawny head against Lane's great chest, and took his hand and pressed it to her cheek. Lane gave Bill a queer look. Bill gulped, and seemed to see something in the distance. Perhaps, it was a vision of two desert-wanderers playing with a baby girl. Anyway, he drew forth a vast handkerchief and pretended that he had something in his eyes.

Buld fidgeted uneasily.

Billie suddenly realized that she had not presented the mining expert. She turned in Lane's arms, and waved her hand at Buld.

"That is Mr. Buld, Uncle Rex," she cooed. "He's a mining expert, and has six—no, five—children, and never told me about them until Ethelbert—that's Ethelbert over there—found it out and came all the way out in the desert and told me."

Lane placed his hands under Billie's elbows and gently set her to one side. Then he leaped at Buld, and secured a good grip of that gentleman's scruff and propelled him through the camp to the automobile. The prospecter seemed to be enjoying the work, for he grinned back at Billie who nodded approval. Buld had served to arouse Ethelbert's jealousy, and thus held no further interest for her.

Buld struggled, of course, but he was helpless in the hands of the silent, remorseless Lane.

Billie's foster-uncle heaved him into the automobile, and pointed in the direction of Beamer.

Pierre came running with the letter from Mrs. Buld. The mining expert snatched the letter from the cook's hand and threw it down on the seat beside him with a great show of rage.

Lane continued to point in the direction of Beamer. Then the prospecter noticed that Buld's hat was missing from his head. He picked it up, brushed it with the back of his hand, set it on Buld's head and smacked it down. Then he resumed his signpost attitude.

Buld got the automobile under way, and presently he was ancient history. Lane watched the automobile until it disappeared in the greasewood, and then returned to Billie, brushing his hands.

"You see, Ethelbert," Bill told the young man dryly, "Rex has a way about him that you lack. Rex always backs up what he thinks. Rex doesn't approve of a married man flirting with Billie, and so Rex sends him on his way."

Ethelbert tried to think of something to say, but his mind seemed to have adjourned.

Billie had forgotten that there was ever such a being as Abner Buld. She took Lane by the hand and led him around camp on a tour of inspection. She took him into her tent, and showed him the wonders of that desert boudoir.

Again that small vulture began gnawing at Ethelbert's vitals. This Lane was a man, even if he was her foster-uncle. A foster-uncle was not a blood relative. It was not right for a man who was not a blood relative to walk around holding a girl's hand that way.

Billie, as they came out of the tent,

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whirled in front of Lane and laid her hands on his shoulders.

"Will you do something for me?" she coaxed.

"Anything within reason," he assured her, smiling down at her eager face.

With a mysterious backward glance at Ethelbert, she said quickly:

"I want you to take Ethelbert on a three days' prospecting trip, and carry packs. I want you to set him a good pace. Don't ask me any questions. But, if Ethelbert hangs back, be rough with him. Of course you mustn't strike him."

"Say!" ejaculated Lane. "You don't want much. Expect me to put up with that doughhead for three days? Why, Billie, you're asking too much!"

"Uncle Rex!" This in a sorrowful, reproachful voice.

"Oh, well," he surrendered, "if you are making a test of this tenderfoot, I suppose I will do what you want. But it doesn't seem right for you to take advantage of me this way."

Billie laughed. The idea of any one taking advantage of Rex Lane was very amusing to her. But, as usual, she had her own way.

She skipped over to Ethelbert to give him the glad news.

"Uncle Rex has promised to take you out on a prospecting trip with him, and teach you all about mining. Won't that be fine? You'll start in the morning."

Ethelbert displayed no marked enthusiasm. He could see no particular reason for any close association with this Rex Lane. And he wasn't wild about mining which to him meant digging with a shovel. But his mind could conjure up no objection to the program Billie had outlined. However, there was one consolation: there would be no man in camp save her father. Pierre, the cook, didn't count, being too old. Still, some stranger might wander in, and, seeing Billie, decide to remain indefinitely. And he, Ethelbert Binns, would not be there to advise her. With the sensation of being adrift on the tide of Fate, he submitted. Unable to speak, he nodded weakly.

EARLY the following morning Lane gave him a big canteen and a heavy pack, and led the way from camp. Billie was not up to bid them "Good luck." This pained Ethelbert. It seemed deliberate cruelty on her part to remain in her snug quarters while he launched forth into the unknown.

All that forenoon Lane led Ethelbert a frightful chase over crumbling hills beneath a merciless sun. When Ethelbert lagged, he would bawl back at him.

"Come on! What's ailing you? Sick or something? Come on! We haven't got started yet!"

Ethelbert had been nursing the canteen until he felt like a walking cistern.

At last he sat down, confident that he could not stagger another step. Lane returned and sneered down at him.

"You're a fine specimen, I don't think! What do you think we do in this country, furnish people with hammocks and carry them? Do you think we'll find anything with you sitting there and filling your hide with water?"

He seized Ethelbert by the arm and jerked him to his feet.

"Come on, you lob!"

"But I don't want to do this!" Ethelbert suddenly squealed. "There is no sense in it! Where are we going? What are we going to do?"

"Oh, we're out for a little stroll," Lane replied solemnly. "We're out to enjoy the air and look at the scenery."

He released Ethelbert, and the young man immediately sat down.

Lane looked down at him for several moments, brow wrinkled, eyes half-closed.

"Listen, mud-head," he commanded kindly. "The idea is for you to brace up and follow me. I am twenty-five years older than you are. Doesn't that touch you in any way? Come on, and we'll find a little orphan gold mine that wants some one to adopt it."

"I don't want to find any gold mine," Ethelbert wailed.

He struggled to his feet and started back. Lane halted him by the simple process of seizing his arm. Immediately Ethelbert sat down.

"Do you think," Lane inquired with mock gentleness, "if I gave you a good jolt in the jaw that it would help you to see what a piece of soft cheese you are?"

"I do not care to talk to you," Ethelbert mumbled.

Lane looked around at the desert and made a hopeless gesture. Then he hauled Ethelbert to his feet, and half-dragged him a good hundred yards. But at last the

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prospecter realized that he was working against hopeless odds.

"No use," he muttered. "I'll have to give up."

He released Ethelbert, who immediately sat down.

Lane shook his head and started back to camp. Ethelbert arose and followed him.

Lane's report to Billie was brief.

"Couldn't do anything with him. He has the sitting-down habit."

"Thank you for trying him out," Billie said sweetly. "I know you did the best you could."

She kissed the tips of her fingers and patted her foster-uncle's cheek lightly.

Ethelbert saw that finger-tip kiss. Again the little vulture's beak sunk into his vitals. The man was not a blood relative, and had no right to receive finger-tip kisses. He would speak to her father about it; it was his duty to speak to him about it. He was very tired, but his duty was plain. This man Lane was a brute—of that he was sure. Probably taking the advantage of the friendship of Billie's father.

Ethelbert found Bill gazing at the sunset. Now and then a little ring of smoke arose from his pipe.

"I think that Miss Billie should not be so familiar—that is Mr. Lane shouldn't——"

Ethelbert was stuttering now, hardly recognizing the words that his tongue was forming.

"What do you mean?" Bill suddenly roared. "Setting yourself up for a critic of my daughter's actions? Think she should not love my old pard, eh?"

Then he laughed, and surveyed the distraught young man out of the corner of one half-closed eye.

Ethelbert swallowed a lump in his throat.

"Go on," encouraged Bill. "Let's hear what you think. First it was Buld and now it's Rex. Let's hear what you think. But don't overstrain your mind. Just go easy and learn a little something every day. Maybe in a thousand years you'll be half-witted. Let's hear what you think."

"It is not right for a young lady to kiss a man who is not her brother or her father or her husband," Ethelbert intoned, as though repeating something from a ritual.

"You act like you were about half stuck on my girl yourself," Bill plumped at him with disconcerting suddenness. "Is that why you're so worried? Be a man and tell the truth if it kills you."

Ethelbert was terribly confused. His feet ached, and his mind was all gummed up. He opened his mouth, but no sound came forth.

"Out of air," muttered Bill; and walked away, leaving Ethelbert gaping.

"I think," Lane was saying to Billie, "that you are up against an impossibility. You can't make a man out of mud."

VI

SHAD Ethelbert's intelligence been completely unfolded, he would have deduced the true condition of his heart from one symptom—hatred of whiskers. He now possessed a varicolored beard which he loathed. There were several clumps of black hair, a patch or two of brown, several of flaming red, and here and there single hairs of nondescript muckle-dun.

At times he thought of appealing to the men of the camp, but there was an air about them all that discouraged familiarity. Ethelbert felt that one had to be a pretty close friend to ask a man for the use of his razor. Besides he had never shaved himself, and was sure that the operation would be attended with throat-cutting and ear-slicing.

In Billie's presence Ethelbert suffered keen agony. His beard "pulled," and he felt like an unclean thing, and wanted to hide.

Worrying about his whiskers, Ethelbert displayed no interest when Happy Jack, accompanied by his partner, and driving a pair of small mules, rattled into camp and announced that they were on their way to "a big dance at Beamer."

As the boys dashed away, Billie turned thoughtfully to her father.

"I believe I'll take Ethelbert to that dance. It will help with his education, don't you think?"

"Suit yourself," Bill returned, stifling a yawn. "Rex and I are going on a little trip—probably be gone a couple of weeks. So you can stay as long as you like. You'll stay as long as you like anyway, but I'm just saying it to be talking. Better stick close to your tame rabbit, though; some of those Beamer boys might get rough with

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him, and strike him with a feather or something. Go ahead, hon—anything you want. Pierre will hold down the camp."

Billie found Ethelbert nervously rubbing his whiskers.

"I am going to take you to a dance at Beamer," she announced. "Won't that be fun?"

Ethelbert left off his whiskers-rubbing to throw up his head like a startled horse. She proposed taking him to a dance where men put their arms around women and whirled them 'round and 'round to wicked music. Why, back in his home town, people who attended dances were counted as lost souls.

Still, there were his whiskers. If he did not get them removed within a few days they would be down on his chest. Even in his dreams he had felt them growing. For a chance to get his whiskers scraped off he would risk his soul's salvation. Beamer was a town and in a town there was always a barber. Once his whiskers were removed he could talk to her about the evils of dancing.

But about the criminal uncle? Uncle John, the near-murderer and thief, lived in Beamer. She must never know. He would permit his uncle to gloat over his ill-gotten gains that she might not know that he, Ethelbert Binns, was the nephew of a man who should be in prison.

Weakly he consented to accompany her to the dance.

"Good," was Billie's blithe comment "We'll start within an hour."

When they were ready for the trail, she mounted her pony, and ordered Ethelbert to fall in in the rear of the pack-burros.

"Off to the big city," she cried, leaning over and kissing her father.

Lane came swinging into camp.

"By-by, Uncle Rex," she giggled. "Bertie is going to chaperon me."

"Bertie!" yelled Lane. "What's this I hear? Bertie! Help!"

He raised his hands in a gesture significant of futility. Bill placed a hand on his stomach, and pretended he was sick.

Billie gave her head a little toss, and jogged from camp waving farewells. The pack-burros and Ethelbert obediently followed.

It was a delightful afternoon, with a little sniff of cool mountain air straying down from the distant peaks.

Ethelbert wondered if they would reach the town before dark. He did not like the idea of traveling across the desert after sundown. One might step on a snake in the dark.

He ventured a meek inquiry.

Billie reined in.

"Oh, no, we can't reach town tonight," she answered carelessly. "We'll camp at Eleven Palms, and go on in the morning."

Ethelbert flinched. Did she realize what she was saying? What would the people of his home town say about a girl who would camp out overnight with—with—a man? Merciful heavens! Was it the usual thing for her to camp out with men? Yet, as he contemplated the matter, it gradually dawned on him that he could endure camping out with her, but—ah, that was what hurt—had she camped out with other men?

"Do you usually camp out—" he began stammering, "er—er—this—er—this way?"

"Don't be alarmed, Ethelbert," she assured him, smiling down at him wickedly. "I won't hurt you."

"But Miss Seaver—Miss Billie—what—what—will people say—about you—about us?"

Billie's wicked smile gave way to one of pity.

"Well," she drawled, "this is a country where people who talk too much over nothing generally move on." Then, sharply: "I've camped out with men ever since I was a baby. I mean real men, Ethelbert, not things that judge a girl by their own low standards."

Ethelbert reeled against the nearest burro. So she was that kind of a woman. And he was beginning to like her. He felt that the word "like" was a good word. To him it was a sort of nunnish sister to "nice." He had not reached the point where he could pronounce the word "love."

He drew himself up stiffly and made a little bow.

"You must not blame me then, Miss Seaver, if people make remarks."

Billie laughed a clear, bell-like soprano laugh.

Ethelbert sighed. She was hopeless. How could she laugh at the loss of her good name?

"Come on, you jacks," Billie chimed, including Ethelbert in the command.

As there seemed to be nothing else that he could do, Ethelbert obeyed.

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WHEN they arrived at Eleven Palms, Billie superintended the unpacking of the camp equipment, and gave Ethelbert instructions in camp cookery.

"My, but you're thick-headed," she scolded. "I do wish that you would show some signs of intelligence, Ethelbert. Daddy never makes any mistakes. Look out, the coffee is boiling over."

Poor Ethelbert seized the bail of the coffee boiler, and, of course, burned his fingers.

"It's hot," remarked Billie a trifle sarcastically. "It has been over the fire and is therefore hot."

In some fashion Ethelbert managed to prepare the meal. He had had some dim idea of Billie preparing supper while he lounged at ease.

"I'll cook breakfast," she promised. "That's the way daddy and I do when we're out; we take turns at cooking."

After supper Billie indicated two oblongs of canvas, and a roll of blankets.

"Spread out those two pieces of canvas. Then, when you're sleepy, take one of those blankets and roll up in it."

Ethelbert spread out one piece of canvas, but retained a death-grip on the other.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked, with a little impatient gesture. "Why don't you put down the canvas?"

He looked about him foolishly.

"I was thinking," he bleated, "that I had better go some distance from—from here—and—sleep."

"What for?" Sharp and imperative.

"Why, er—er—it wouldn't look right for me——"

She stamped her foot.

"For goodness' sake, Ethelbert, talk like a rational human being! I can't understand such mumbling and stuttering. Are you trying to tell me that you do not want to sleep in camp? If that is what you mean, why take your canvas and your blanket and get out. You poor thing, I am trying to teach you something, and all the time your mind is busy with little, silly, cheap thoughts."

Ethelbert strove to speak, but her eyes were sparkling with anger and he felt that it would not be wise to irritate her further. With an air of injured virture, he took his canvas and his blanket and slowly left the camp. If she had no regard for what people might say, he would at least do all he could to save her good name.

Ethelbert felt that propriety demanded that he make his bed out of sight of the camp. Then it occurred to him that he should be near enough to Billie to go to her assistance in case some animal threatened to injure her. He thought of coyotes. Coyotes, he had heard Bill say, were harmless except when they become afflicted with hydrophobia. A mad coyote might rush in and bite her. Yes, he would make his bed within sight of the camp.

He spread the canvas, wrapped the blanket around him, and lay down. Then he thought of snakes and sat up. He could see Billie sitting by the fire. Perhaps he should start a fire. No, that would not be the thing to do; he might pick up a snake instead of a piece of wood.

He made a vain attempt to sleep. Billie had now disappeared and the little fire was merely a heap of red coals.

Presently there came a hoarse bellow from the darkness beyond camp. Some man was attempting to sing.

Ethelbert sprang to his feet. A man was entering the camp, and Billie was asleep. He ran toward the fire. A figure staggered out of the darkness, muttering—

"What's this I see—what's this I see?"

ETHELBERT was vaguely aware that Billie was standing near the fire and kicking some mesquite on the coals. The fire flared up and disclosed a shaggy individual, swaying slightly. Ethelbert caught the reek of whisky.

"Jerry," he heard Billie say calmly, "you are drunk."

"Hah!" exclaimed Jerry. "A gal!"

Jerry was a desert-rat of uncertain age who had known Billie since she was a baby. Sober, he would no more have thought of annoying her than of cutting off his right hand. But he was drunk, and his befogged mind considered only one fact; here was a woman.

"Give us a kiss," he blathered, lurching toward her.

Now, Billie, being in possession of her automatics, might have dropped Jerry in his tracks, but she knew that he was drunk and that, when he sobered up, he would suffer the tortures of the damned until she had forgiven him.

The fire was now blazing brightly. Billie permitted Jerry to lay a grimy paw on

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her shoulder, and then she looked questioningly at the paralyzed Ethelbert.

"Are you going to permit a man to insult me?" she asked with a grim little smile.

Ethelbert felt a terrible revulsion toward a mix-up with this shaggy creature, reeking with whisky fumes. His quaking soul shivered with the dread of struggle. Then he saw Billie attempt to draw back, and those arms, incased in ragged, filthy sleeves, widen to encircle her.

With an odd strangled cry, he flung himself at the intruder. Jerry developed marvelous resistance. He was an old man, but a tough one. Ethelbert was surprized that his rage did not permit him utterly to destroy the man.

They fought a blind, scrambling, clawing fight. Ethelbert clawed, hammered and kicked. The reek of the man nauseated him, and once he felt a tiny panic that made his stomach grow cold. Suppose the man overpowered him? What then—what then? No, that was not to be thought of. He must conqueur.

The struggle cleared Jerry's head, and he began yelling:

"Here, here! What's up? Here, here! What's up?"

"I'll show you what's up," gritted Ethelbert, manhood struggling within him; "I'll show you what's up—you darned old fool!"

This was the full measure of Ethelbert's profane efforts. When he gritted "darned old fool" he had reached the limit.

They were in the mesquite now and suffering cruelly from the thorns. Ethelbert managed to straddle the writhing form of Jerry, and began blindly pounding the recumbent one's face and shoulder.

Old Jerry was howling like a wolf with his paw in a trap, but Ethelbert continued his blind slugging.

Then he felt a small hand clutch his hair, and heard Billie shrill close to his ear——

"Stop it, I tell you; stop it!"

Ethelbert arose from his victim, assisted by that hand firmly gripping his hair. She led him to the fire.

Jerry crawled out from the mesquite on his hands and knees.

"What's up?" he rumbled thickly. "What's up?"

With a great effort he gained his feet and stared about him stupidly.

The girl released Ethelbert and confronted the old desert-rat.

"Jerry," she scolded, "you should be ashamed of yourself! You came into my camp drunk, and insulted me."

"Bill Seaver's girl!" yelled Jerry, recognizing her. "What—what have I been doin'?"

"You tried to kiss me, Jerry."

"Tried to kiss you?" he mumbled, his eyes rolling.

The last wisp of whisky fog lifted from his brain, and he became utterly abject.

"Aw, Miss Billie, I beg your pardon. Drinkin', I guess. Been drinkin' comin' out." He stretched a shaking hand toward her. "Please don't hold it agin me—please. I'll do anything—anything—only don't hold it agin me. Please don't, Miss Billie—please don't."

"That's all right, Jerry," she assured him. "Move along now. Your burros are waiting for you."

Jerry shambled into the darkness, shame hurrying his steps.

The girl turned to Ethelbert. His shirt was torn and his face was bleeding.

"Sit down," she ordered.

He dropped down in the sand, and she proceeded to bathe his face.

"Pretty close to your eyes," she murmured. "There's a big scratch right over your left eye. I wonder how poor Jerry feels? You know he is past sixty."

"Past sixty," gasped Ethelbert, recalling vividly the strength of the man he had fought. "Why——"

"Say nothing about it," she advised, a little soothing note in her voice. "You must not count whipping Jerry to your credit. He is too old to count, but he's good to practice on."

"Practice on?" quavered Ethelbert.

"Yes; you'll have to learn to whip a real man after a while. I know you have it in you, Ethelbert. Time will tell."

She straightened up and surveyed her handiwork.

"Now," she briskly declared, "we'll have no more of your sissy foolishness. Go get your blanket and come in camp and go to sleep."

Dumbly Ethelbert obeyed. He spread out the canvas, and then awkwardly attempted to roll up in his blanket.

"Here, let me show you," she snapped. "Of all the awkward things!" She spread the blanket out on the canvas. "Now lie down on the blanket," she commanded;

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and drew the loose half of the blanket over him. "Good night."

Silence, and the slow hours dragging by. Then a terrible thought smote Ethelbert. Suppose this Jerry told the world that he had found Miss Billie Seaver alone in a camp by some palms with a man—a man by the name of Ethelbert Binns?

"Billie—Miss Billie," he called softly.

No response. He tried in vain to sleep. Ah, if he arose and sat by the fire that would take the curse off the thing. If any one entered the camp, he could say that Miss Seaver was "resting."

He actually arose and sat up all night. In the morning he looked over at the little gray mound which was Billie. She was sound asleep, and from beneath the blanket peeped a round, slim ankle.

Ethelbert virtuously turned his head and surveyed the red splendor of the desert dawn.

VII

BILLIE led the way into Beamer's combination livery-stable and garage, where she placed the burros and her pony in the charge of a yawning gawk who seemed to have been sleeping in the hay.

"Now, Ethelbert," she planned. "I have a great many things to do. In the meantime you had better look around town and get acquainted with the people."

Ethelbert gave her a good imitation of a mental vacuum.

"But I've never been introduced to any one here. I do not know any one in this town except——"

He shut his mouth quickly. He had almost told her about that mean, contemptible uncle of his.

"You don't need an introduction in this town," she informed him. "Just go into the saloons and the stores and you will soon get acquainted. As you do not drink, it won't hurt you to go into the saloons."

From some mysterious hiding-place she produced a roll of bills, and peeled off several and handed them to Ethelbert.

"There's enough money to buy some clothes and get shaved and everything. You ought to have enough left to sport around a little, too. You might try your luck at roulette. If you lose a dollar or two, you may get over that young-turkey-calling-for-its-mama look."

Plainly her expression indicated that she was Bill Seaver's daughter.

Ethelbert was utterly flabbergasted. She seemed to be in her right mind and yet she was giving him money to "sport around." He tried to make a polite little speech, but his tongue went on a strike. He wanted to say, "But I'm not a sporting man," but no sound issued from his mouth.

"It's this way," she went on, as one who discusses practical things, "you're too good, Ethelbert. People who are too good often forget to be kind and forgiving and broad-minded and fearless and all those things. If a person is too good the conscience is not working. Only one who has done something he thinks is wrong has any use for a conscience."

She shook the dust of the trail from her skirt.

"I am beginning to like you, Ethelbert, but I am not going to have you so good that you can talk down-hill to me. Now run along and sport around with the boys tonight, and tomorrow night we'll go to the dance. But do not get into a poker game with these Beamer sharps. They would take the clothes off your back, Ethelbert. And for goodness sake do not sing that little song you have been warbling to me ever since I met you. Please, Ethelbert, do not tell any man in Beamer that you do not drink liquor or use tobacco in any form, and do not tell any man the story of your spotless life. You can not impress these Beamer men with anything except action, and if you are not prepared to act, keep still."

"This is terrible," he groaned.

"What is terrible?" Impatiently.

"Why — why — asking me to sport around!"

Billie sighed and gave him a hopeless look.

"Come with me, then. I suppose we can buy some ice-cream at the drug-store, and read the papers. You certainly are not looking for excitement."

Ethelbert, his thoughts milling madly, followed her from the livery stable.

Manuel Garcia had noted the arrival of the two-gun girl at the stable and slipped back to the shelter of an alley that looked out on a sort of plaza which the Beamer hotel and Jack Watts' saloon faced. The west side of Beamer's main street extended some distance beyond the east side. Garcia was in the east-side alley.

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Billie saw the Mexican lounging in the alley, but gave not the slightest hint that she was aware of his existence. Ethelbert, dragging his feet, straggled so far back of her that she was on the hotel steps before he was even with the alley.

Garcia's instinct told him that the straggler was a tenderfoot of the softest variety. Here was an opportunity to ease the pangs of revenge. Apparently the tenderfoot was a lover of the two-gun girl. He swaggered from the alley and intercepted Ethelbert, who gave him one startled look, and then, figuratively speaking, lay down and turned up both hands and feet.

To Ethelbert, this swarthy being, with the great, black mustache, looked as fierce as a grizzly bear. Having spent the greater portion of his life in contemplating his own virtues, Ethelbert was not a shrewd student of human nature. This dark man looked "bad," and therefore must be "bad." He did not know that nature frequently decks the most timid and cowardly man with the mustache of a grenadier and the look of a desperado.

"You come with her?" queried Garcia menacingly; and taking out a big jackknife.

Ethelbert's eyes popped at the knife, and he felt the cold, damp fingers of fear rat-a-tat on his stomach.

"I will fight you for her," Garcia stated flatly. "I will kill you! I will r-r-rip you wide open!"

The cold fingers of fear now left Ethelbert's stomach and played a jig on his backbone. Still, this was a town, and where there was a town there was law, and where there was law there were officers to enforce it.

"You'd better mind your own business," he suddenly bleated, "or I'll speak to an officer about you."

Garcia lifted his shoe-brush mustache in a terrible grin. This was easier than he had anticipated—a white man who talked about appealing to the law. Surely this was a tenderfoot of exceeding softness. The girl was to be feared, but not this bleating thing.

Billie had presented Ethelbert with one of her father's old hats. As an insulting and irritating prelude to the torture he proposed to inflict, Garcia swept that hat from his victim's head. Ethelbert stooped to recover that precious hat, and received a kick that sent him sprawling. He scrambled to his feet, and backed fearfully away from the Mexican.

"Ha," sneered the swarthy one. "Scared to fight, eh? Better leave my girl alone, then."

As Billie came up on the hotel porch, Jack Watts greeted her heartily.

"Comin' to town pretty often these days, Miss Billie," he said in his friendly way. "How's the dad? I was tellin' Bill the last time he was——"

Something suddenly jerked Watts' attention from the girl, and he shook his head and rubbed his eyes.

"What's that I see," he exploded. "A white man bein' kicked by a greaser."

Then in a quick, angry aside to Billie:

"Who's the white scrub? Do you know him?"

"Oh, yes," Billie calmly enlightened the indignant saloonkeeper, "he came in with me. He arrived at our camp some time ago, but he has never told us how he happened to be adrift in the desert. His name is Ethelbert Binns."

WATTS sprang from the porch and charged across the plaza. Garcia saw him coming, and fairly flew into the alley. The next moment a pair of powerful hands were gripping Ethelbert's neck, and two flaming eyes were staring into his.

The saloonkeeper had never seen his nephew, but there was no mistaking the family resemblance. The craven had the Watts look.

"It's him all right," he gritted; and dragged the terror-stunned young man across the plaza, and into a card-room in the rear of the saloon.

Watts hurled his nephew into a chair and bent over him, face working, mustache bristling.

"Do you know who I am?" he snorted.

The expression on Ethelbert's face indicated that he knew less than nothing about anything.

"I'm your uncle, John Watts," bawled the saloonkeeper. "Your uncle, do you understand, you cowardly pup? Look at me good, and then ask me if I am goin' to let a nephew of mine come into a town, where I'm looked up to and respected, and let a Mexican kick him over on his face? Look at me good, and answer!"

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Ethelbert's lips moved, but no sound issued therefrom.

Watts paced to and fro for several moments, fuming and cursing. Finally he halted and leveled a forefinger at his supine nephew.

"Tell me how it happened, and tell it straight. Did you—" this hopefully—"hit the greaser first?"

"No," sniveled Ethelbert. "He knocked my hat off."

"Great Gawd!" groaned Watts, clinching his hands and tossing them ceilingward. "A nephew of mine let a greaser knock his hat off!"

The saloonkeeper suddenly affected a curious calmness.

"Tell me," he requested in a flat voice, "how you come to land in the Seaver camp?"

As best he could, Ethelbert recounted his adventures on the train. But when he recalled that treacherous blow on the head and the loss of his money, he became very peevish. He arose and waggled his head at his uncle.

"You sent me a telegram telling me to meet you at Gila, and then you hit me on the head and took my money—that's what you did!" His voice rose almost to a screech. "Why didn't you tell me you needed money—oh, why didn't you?"

The saloonkeeper gave his nephew a sharp glance, and then gently forced him back in the chair, the while he muttered—

"Crazy as a loon."

For a time Watts studied his sister's son. Then he seized Ethelbert's arm, dragged him into the barroom, and indicated a small mountain of gold and silver stacked up back of the roulette wheel.

"See that?" he asked softly. "That is mine—everything in this place is mine. Do you think I would bother about your small change? Besides, I haven't been out of Beamer for six months. You were tricked by some train-sharp. Now come with me. I have something more important to talk about than money."

Again Ethelbert found himself in the card-room.

"Let's see that telegram I was supposed to have sent you," Watts demanded.

Ethelbert produced the telegram. Watts read it.

"A cheap fake," he growled. Crumpling the paper in his great hand, he tossed it over his shoulder. "You certainly were a full-blooded sucker."

He seated himself, and hunched his chair close to Ethelbert's.

"Now, young feller, we are goin' to get down to businesss," he announced, his eyes boring into Ethelbert's very soul. "You've got to run that greaser out of town and do it quick. If you don't, I'll take you out on the street and give you a beatin' to measure time from. I'll break every bone in your body."

He jerked a gun from his hip pocket, hauled Ethelbert to his feet, and shoved the weapon into the young man's pistol-pocket.

"Now you're heeled," he ground out. "Go run that Mex out of town or take a lickin' from me. Boy, I'll half kill you if you hang back, and no mistake! Hear me talkin'?"

Ethelbert heard all right. His hearing was especially good, but his backbone seemed to be a huge icicle.

Watts seized his arm. Like an automaton Ethelbert marched stiffly through the saloon with his uncle, out on the sidewalk, and into the street. There Watts left him and drew back into the saloon entrance, where he lighted a cigar and waited for his nephew to erase the stain from the family escutcheon.

With no idea as to his destination, Ethelbert walked jerkily across the street. When he found himself on a sidewalk, he simply followed it.

Garcia had run up the alley and turned into the main street at the first cross street. Here was the tenderfoot again. He would resume his play with him, now that the saloonkeeper was not in evidence.

Billie came out of the hotel and Watts quickly joined her in front of the hostelry.

"He's goin' to run the Mex out of town," he told her, with affected calmness. "If he don't, I'll take the hide off'n him."

Billie made no reply, but slipped past Watts to a position opposite Ethelbert and the Mexican. Ethelbert saw her as through a mist. The Mexican's back was to her. Her little hands rested in those buckskin-lined pockets on her riding-skirt.

To Ethelbert the street now seemed vague and indistinct. Upon a cloud of smoke floated the hideous face of the Mexican. Where was Billie? Was that her—miles and miles away? What was that in his hip pocket? A gun? Yes. The Mexican

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would stab him with the big jack-knife. He must get the gun out quickly and keep it between him and the knife. Clumsily he pulled the weapon.

Vaguely, as a drowning man going down for the last time, Ethelbert realized that the Mexican's hands were raised and that he was babbling something that sounded like—

"Don't shoot — please, mister, don't shoot!"

Shoot? Shoot what? That thing in his hand? What was it? Involuntarily his finger tightened on the trigger. The gun exploded, and the Mexican gave a wild yell and plunged between two buildings. But a pile of old boxes and rubbish blocked Garcia's way, and he leaped back frantically, whirled and jack-rabbited up the street.

Ethelbert was trying to get rid of the gun, but he seemed to have lost control of his hand. Again the gun exploded, being a double-action, and again Ethelbert tried to get rid of it. He attempted to hurl it from him, but forgot to telegraph his hand to loosen, and for the third time it exploded. The bullet, whining over the fleeing Garcia's head, caused that speeding individual to make one final, gasping, desperate spurt for shelter.

Ethelbert gave up trying to get rid of the gun, and surrendered to the inevitable. If the thing had to explode every time he moved, he would let it explode until it got tired. Mechanically he pulled the trigger. Three more explosions, but he kept on pulling the trigger. He was still clicking the hammer on empty shells when his uncle came up and led him across the street to Billie.

ETHELBERT looked at her dully, as she congratulated him. She seemed to be pleased about something—yes, quite pleased about something.

As from a great distance, he heard his uncle's voice.

"Miss Billie, now that this feller has come clean, I want to tell you who he is." He paused impressively. "He's my only nephew, and what's mine is his."

"Why, Ethelbert," Billie reproached. "Why didn't you tell me Mr. Watts was your uncle?"

Ethelbert made a futile attempt to reply.

Watts grinned sympathetically at his nephew, and gave the girl a hurried account of the whys and the wherefores of the victimizing of Ethelbert.

"He thought I was that train-crook," the saloonkeeper concluded, "and was ashamed to tell you. He knows better now, though."

"Poor boy," commiserated the girl, "he never uses his mind."

"No," Watts sadly admitted, "he don't seem to figger on the other feller's hand. Studies his own hand all right, but never figgers on what he has to beat. I am goin' to learn him a few——"

"Just one moment, Mr. Watts," Billie firmly interrupted. "Do not forget that Ethelbert is to return to the desert with me."

Watts nodded meekly.

"What do you want me to do with him now?" he asked.

"Take him to some quiet place, and help him to calm his nerves," she gently answered. "The poor boy needs a rest."

"All right. I'll take him down to my place and throw a jolt into him."

"You'll do nothing of the kind," she said, with such sharp decisiveness that Watts dodged and blinked. "Ethelbert has never touched liquor or tobacco, and he never will, if I can prevent it. You may be his uncle, but I know what is good for him. You will please do as I request."

Watts bowed his acquiescence.

"Your orders," he humbly promised, "will be obeyed. Who be I to say anything when the sweetest girl in the desert tells me what to do?"

Billie rewarded him with a radiant smile.

Ethelbert felt his uncle's strong hand tighten on his arm.

"Come with me, Bert. Orders from headquarters. Lift up your feet, and come with your poor old uncle."

Presently they were in the card-room. A bartender entered with a pitcher of water, a glass of whisky and a towel.

Watts eased the "gun-fighter" into a chair, soaked the towel in the water and pressed it to the "warrior's" brow. As for the glass of whisky, Watts surveyed it a little doubtfully. He made a move to pour it into Ethelbert's mouth, shook his head, and compromised with his conscience by passing it gently to and fro under Ethelbert's nose. Then he tossed it down his own throat.

Ethelbert recovered slowly. Memory began to function. He had sought the Mexican and the Mexican had run from him. He had used a weapon—a gun.

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Jerkily he arose, with a vague idea of posing as a man who had done his duty.

"I did what I thought was right," he quavered.

Ethelbert saw no wrong in making a virtue of necessity.

Watts frowned and pushed him back in the chair.

"Now don't get swelled up, Bert," he chided gently. "You were scared stiff. I saw that plain enough. It was just a question of who was scared the most, you or the greaser. I think you was scared the most, for the greaser used his legs. You were too badly scared to run—you couldn't. But the girl thinks you have come clean, and we'll let it go at that. You've got a reputation now, Bert, and you'll have to make it good."

Ethelbert raised a limp hand and dropped it weakly.

"Reputation—make it good," he parroted faintly.

Watts gently assisted his war-worn nephew to an erect position, and pointed him toward the card-room door.

"We'd better go to the hotel," he suggested, "and get you a room. You've had a hard day; you need rest."

In the hotel, at his uncle's suggestion, Ethelbert attempted to sign the register, but his hand shook so that Watts had to sign it for him.

The saloonkeeper thrust a key into his nephew's hand, and guided him to the foot of a stairway in the rear of the hotel office.

"Take a good rest," he advised, "I'll see you later. So long."

Slowly Ethelbert mounted the stairway, and wandered down the hall.

In a dazed fashion he looked at the number on the key tag. The tag carried the numeral "six," but Ethelbert read it "nine." The guests of the Beamer hotel were given keys merely as a matter of form. The key to room six would unlock room nine as readily as the key to room nine would unlock room six.

Ethelbert left the key in the lock, and wandered into room nine. The window curtain was down. He saw only the gleam of the white counterpane on the bed. That was what he wanted—a bed.

He threw his coat on a chair, drew off his shoes and sprawled out on the bed. Rest and peace at last.

But Fate works even while we sleep, spinning unceasingly the web with which to enmesh us poor, purblind mortals.

Ethelbert had never heard of Julius Fanworthy, the renowned female impersonator, but Fate thought she saw a chance to use the actor and brought him to Beamer. Fate knew all along that the lack of accommodations at the Beamer Opera House would force Fanworthy to use his bedroom as a dressing-room, and cause him to enter the back door of the hotel office, garbed in feminine finery.

Fate also arranged for Miss Billie Seaver to visit some friends, and arrive in the hotel office a few moments before Fanworthy slipped through the back door carrying his blond wig.

Billie inspected the hotel register—the Beamer hotel could not afford a night clerk—and noted that key six was absent from its hook on the rack. Poor Ethelbert, she thought, was asleep.

FATE, some time ago, had arranged that Fanworthy possess a weakness for pretty girls.

If Billie was easy to contemplate when garbed in her riding-togs, she was a magnet for the eye when swathed in soft silk, with her little feet cased in white shoes, and her big eyes shaded by a floppy, flimsy hat that had enriched a Los Angeles milliner to the extent of forty hard dollars. She kept several wardrobe trunks stored in her room in the Beamer hotel for just such a lightning change.

Of course Billie was a trifle surprized at the entrance of a bald-headed man, arrayed in a rather "loud" gown, and carrying a blond wig; but she quickly recalled the remarks of her friends concerning the performance of the female impersonator, and merely gave him a cursory glance as she started toward the stairway.

"Wonderful hotel this," Fanworthy remarked, as he followed her up the stairs.

"It is the best we have."

The icy tones of her reply would have discouraged a lesser egotist, but Fanworthy speeded up even with her and gave her a bland, side-smirk.

As they reached the head of the stairway, Billie paused and drew forth from her handbag a tiny pearl-handled, silver-mounted automatic.

"Oh," she said to herself, "I thought I had lost it."

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Fanworthy's eyes bulged and he shied around her. Women were so careless with firearms. He hurried down the hall, glancing back apprehensively.

Reaching the door of his room, he rested a hand against the panel, and glanced back at the girl who carried an automatic gun as a vanity-bag accessory. The door was slightly ajar and swung back at the pressure of Fanworthy's hand. He pitched forward and fell prone. Billie came up as the actor arose, sputtering and fuming. She glanced in and recognized the occupant of the bed.

"Some guy's got my room," stormed the actor in the door.

"It's Ethelbert," she said softly. "Poor boy, he's always making mistakes."

"Ethelbert!" snorted the female impersonator. "Well, Ethelbert is due for a spin on his ear. Watch me throw him out on his head."

She laid a restraining hand on the actor's arm.

"Just a moment, please," she begged. "Wait till I think. Close the door."

Visioning that little automatic, Fanworthy somewhat surlily obeyed.

Billie was all smiles now.

Her hand slipped into the bag, and Fanworthy experienced a touch of faintness. But instead of the expected weapon she drew forth a purse and extracted therefrom a ten-dollar bill.

"When do you leave Beamer?"

Her query was graciousness itself.

"Early in the morning," he replied. "But what——"

"Would this," and she waved the bill toward him, "would this pay you for an extra performance?"

"I don't get you," he grunted, eyes on the money.

"I want you to go into that room and awaken that man and make love to him," she explained.

"Oh, I see," chortled Fanworthy. "You want to get something on the guy? Sure, the ten-spot won't hurt my feelin's, and thanks kindly."

He took the money without a struggle, put on his wig, gave Billie a wicked wink and entered the room.

Billie drew back into the shadows to await the results of the wooing of Ethelbert by Julius Fanworthy, the renowned female impersonator. It must be admitted that to suppress her giggles she was forced to stuff her handkerchief into her mouth.

Now for the play:

Scene One—Enter Fanworthy. Lights lamp. Pretends to discover Ethelbert. Smiles coyly, and gives a little flounce. Seats himself on the edge of the bed and begins rubbing the slumberer's forehead.

Scene Two—Ethelbert awakens. Face shows horror. Gulps. Closes eyes and mumbles, "It's a dream!" Fanworthy pats Ethelbert's shoulder, and murmurs, "Is 'ittle precious sleepy?" Ethelbert raises up, mouth open, eyes bulging. With a shaking hand he touches Fanworthy. Fanworthy leans toward him and asks, "Isn't precious going to kiss his baby?" Ethelbert gives vent to a weird, strangled cry.

Scene Three—Fanworthy arises, goes to dresser, and begins unhooking his dress. Ethelbert gapes at him fascinatedly. Fanworthy turns and shakes finger at him girlishly. "What has sweetheart been doing while his little Pansy was away?" asks Fanworthy, continuing to unhook.

Scene Four—Ethelbert springs wildly from the bed and dashes into the closet. Discovers that he has mistaken the closet door for the door leading into the hall. Staggers back and plunges past Fanworthy.

Scene Five—Fanworthy now becomes heavily dramatic. He throws his arms about Ethelbert's neck, and wails, "Oh, you are angry with your little gel and are going to leave her!" Then, pantingly, "You shall not—you shall not." They struggle toward the door.

Scene Six—Ethelbert is now desperate. "Let me go—let me go!" he pants. "I'll never give you up," declares Fanworthy. "Life would be nothing without you!"

Scene Seven—Ethelbert manages to open the door. Fanworthy clings to him, and they struggle into the hall.

Scene Eight—Billie enters. Ethelbert becomes frozen. "So this is the kind of man you are!" she contemptuously exclaims. "Lady," sobs Fanworthy, "he's taken the best years of me life and now he wants to cast me aside! I can not, I will not, I shall not give him up!"

Ethelbert plunges free of Fanworthy's arms, whirls and stampedes madly from hotel.

CURTAIN.

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VIII

DAWN in the rear of the Beamer livery-stable disclosed a haystack occupying one corner of the foreground. A sleepy gawk, carrying a pitchfork, and scratching his nose, straggled from the stable and plunged the fork into the stack. Something in the stack emitted a yell of mortal agony, boiled forth, knocked the gawk flat, and fled. That something was Ethelbert who, following his escape from the "blonde," had worried through a night in the hay.

He ran blindly and dodged into an alley. Midway down the alley he halted abruptly and sniffed the air. Somewhere coffee was boiling and bacon frying. Yes, he was hungry. He would have to secure food or perish. So he followed his nose into the rear entrance of Beamer's principal café, familiarly known as "The Chink's."

After consuming a mammoth breakfast, he returned to the alley. Hunger was appeased, but Gloom still dogged his steps. That blond woman was insane. Ghastly mistake somewhere. Billie was through with him. Everything was wrong. Never again could he recite to Billie the list of his shining virtues. She considered him a man that no woman could trust. And he was innocent, absolutely innocent. Never'd seen that crazy woman before, and would run to the ends of the earth to escape her. But nothing could convince Billie that he was a victim of circumstantial evidence. Only thing to do was to hide.

Like a hunted thing, he slipped into a cottonwood grove bordering the town limits. Here, at least, was peace. At the first glimpse of the woman who had accused him of wrecking her life, he would flee into the open desert. Perhaps, in time, Billie would pass that way. He would then make one last, desperate effort to convince her of his innocence. But for the present he would remain where there was nothing to obstruct flight.

As Ethelbert entered the cottonwoods, Billie strolled from the hotel, smiling dreamily. Poor Ethelbert, she had given him a scare that would last him for years. He was probably wandering around like a lost sheep. She would find him and prepare him for the dance. Perhaps, when he finally became a broad-minded human being instead of a he-saint, forever prattling of his tidy virtues, she would tell him of the hoax. But for the present she would hold "the blonde" over his head. Miss Seaver believed that a humble man could be more easily moulded than one who was convinced that he was perfect.

She strolled about the town hoping to glimpse the runaway. By mid-afternoon she began to feel alarmed. It was just possible that the poor, frightened boy had performed what the Beamerites termed "skipping the country." She had a vivid mental picture of him fleeing madly across the desert wastes.

She decided to impress Happy Jack into service. Gladly the faithful Happy searched every nook and cranny of the town. He even looked under the sidewalks, and into old barrels and boxes. Gradually widening his circle he came to the cottonwoods, and, unseen by the disconsolate Ethelbert, sped back to Billie with the glad tidings.

She offered to reward the lad for his services, but he roughly waved aside the proffered coin. She then kissed him on the forehead, and departed with a swish of silken skirts. Happy touched the kiss-spot on his forehead tenderly.

"Gosh!" he breathed, looking after her yearningly; and again, "Gosh!"

Warily Billie approached the cottonwoods. She was not quite sure but that Ethelbert would resume his flight at the first glimpse of her. She saw an arm move back of a tree, and decided to surprize him. With Indian caution she tiptoed up to the tree, reached around and tapped the young man on the shoulder.

Ethelbert sprang to his feet with a chattering cry, and looked about him wildly. Billie flattened herself against the tree, stifling her giggles. But an irresponsible breeze whipped out her skirt and the quaking Ethelbert glimpsed that telltale flutter of silk. With dread crinkling his scalp, he circled around the tree. Billie's eyes were full of laughter, but she managed to give him a haughty look. He stared at her with the look of a man who has just awakened from a dream of falling through space. It was a sickening look.

She decided to discard haughtiness, and assume a martyred air.

"Oh, Ethelbert," she wailed, "why didn't you tell me you had a past? Perhaps there are children! You know how Mr. Buld deceived me! Oh, Ethelbert, you seemed

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so different, and then to find that you were just like all the rest!"

"No, no!" he almost screamed. "There are no children. I never saw that darned woman——"

Billie raised a silencing hand.

"Don't curse so, Ethelbert, please. And for my sake do not add lying to your list of crimes. Surely you can not expect me to doubt my eyes. You know the guilty always run." A solemn pause, a hopeless sigh, and then, "But now that the woman has left town——"

"Has she gone—has she gone?" he yelled.

Billie nodded, her beautiful eyes cloudy with sorrow. She had all the qualities necessary to a successful actress.

"Thank goodness," he cried deliriously, "thank goodness!"

Sadly she checked his outburst of joy.

"How can you display such happiness after blasting a woman's life! She said that it had been years and years—years and years, Ethelbert. And now you are glad that you are rid of her. How heartless, Ethelbert, how coldly cruel! You took the best years of her life and then cast her aside. Not content with that you came to me and told me of your spotless life. You are a terrible man, Ethelbert—terrible and dangerous."

He flapped his hands despairingly. Words were of no use now.

She decided to pull out the soft stop.

"But because I am a woman, Ethelbert, I must forgive you. I know that you are a cruel, heartless man, and that this blond woman may be only one of many you have deceived; but, being a woman, I must forgive you."

She placed a trusting hand on his arm and looked up into his face appealingly.

"Yes, I'll forgive you this time," she repeated softly, giving pathos full swing.

Ethelbert brightened considerably. Of course he was innocent, but this forgiveness business had its attractive points. It was very pleasant to be forgiven by her. He almost wished that he had a dark, mildewed past just so she could forgive him.

"Of course," she concluded mournfully, "all you can do now is to be very humble and grateful, and try to live down your past. Will you try, dear?"

"Yes," he husked. Sweet heaven above, she had called him "dear"!

She slipped her hand into his and led him from the cottonwoods. His fingers tightened on hers. Nothing was of any importance now. How soft and warm was her little hand! Opinions? Bah! Dark past? Bah! Blond woman? Bah!

As they came out of the dusky road that led to the main street, she withdrew her hand, reminding him primly—

"People might talk."

He suddenly viewed gossip as a personal enemy.

"Let 'em talk, darn 'em!" he gritted, in a voice that he scarcely recognized as his own.

"Why, Ethelbert!" she gasped, as though shocked at his daring words: inwardly she rejoiced at his improvement.

When they reached the hotel, she became the practical desert-girl.

"Hurry now and get ready for the dance," she told him. "You'll have plenty of time to get shaved and buy new clothes. Call for me here at nine o'clock."

"Anything for you," he sighed, "anything."

"Now don't get sentimental," she reproved; and left him abruptly.

WHEN the hands of the ancient clock in the office indicated the hour of nine, a clean-shaven young man, attired in a light suit, a small straw hat that set high on his head, and a pair of square-toed yellow shoes, entered the hotel, striving to subdue his self-consciousness. 'Twas Ethelbert. His cuffs annoyed him and his collar sawed his neck.

Presently a vision of loveliness floated toward him. Her beauty stabbed him sweetly. It hurt, oh, how it hurt, but he welcomed the pain of it.

"Oh, Miss Seaver—Billie, how beautiful you are!" he wrenched out, swallowing a lump in his throat.

She wanted to tell him that he was all wrong, with his little straw hat, his fawn-colored suit, and his yellow shoes, but his humble adoration disarmed her. One thing at a time, she thought. Later, she would give him a course of instruction regarding clothes.

So she merely said, "Why, Ethelbert!" in quivery, appreciative tones; and took his arm.

As they paused at the foot of the stairway that led up to the dance-hall, the girl patted the arm of her entranced escort.

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"You're a wonder tonight, dear," she cooed.

She meant exactly what she said. A wonder is something new and startling.

But Ethelbert was in no condition to search for the thorns in the verbal bouquet she had handed him. All he knew was that, within a space of three hours, she had twice called him "dear." Nothing could stand in his way now. He glanced indifferently at the long stairway that clung to the side of the two-story stone building. It would not be necessary for him to walk up those stairs; he would float up.

Billie now deemed it necessary to instruct her escort concerning ball-room etiquette.

"This is your first dance," she admonished in impressive tones, "and you must be careful. I shall be very angry with you if you run after some other girl, Ethelbert, and neglect me."

He gave her a stunned look. The idea! Why, only a hopeless idiot would neglect such a girl.

As solemn as any owl, he promised—

"I'll never leave you."

Billie smiled mysteriously.

"You must make it a point to ask me for every dance, too. Understand, Ethelbert—every dance?"

"But I can't dance," he groaned, forgetful of those days when he considered dancing the devil's pet invention.

"That has nothing to do with it; you can learn. Remember now, I'll expect you to ask me for every dance." The little witch gave him a wicked glance. "Remember, every dance."

"I will," he gulped.

Again she smiled mysteriously.

Words are tricky things, easy to say but difficult to make good. Wise is the man who sets not for himself a trap of words. Likewise wisdom sits on the brow of him who takes a hom—er—er a rather plain girl to a dance in a town where a man is not judged by the purity of his diction or the way he parts his hair, but by the speed and jounce he can put in a right swing to point of jaw.

Let him who desires trouble take a beautiful girl to a Beamer dance. If he has religious convictions, he will do well to offer up a little prayer. If he has no trust in Providence, he will display remarkable reasoning powers if he gives deep thought to battle plans.

Little wonder that Billie smiled mysteriously.

As they passed through the big anteroom and into the brightly lighted hall, Ethelbert was swept from Billie's side by rude, inconsiderate men.

"First waltz for me," insisted a huge red-headed youth, with thick ears pushed forward by bumps of combativeness.

"Next for me," pleaded a wide-shouldered youth, with a jaw like the prow of a battleship.

Happy Jack fought his way viciously through the crowd that surrounded Miss Seaver.

"Give me a dance—just one—please?" he vainly beseeched her.

Ethelbert now recalled her instructions. He hurled himself through the crowd, and laid a proprietary hand on her arm.

The young gallants of Beamer drew back, giving way before the ancient right of a girl's escort to the first dance. But they scowled at Ethelbert, and muttered dire threats.

Then, as the music started, they scattered to secure partners. Happy retired disconsolately to the anteroom. If he couldn't dance with Billie, he would ignore the whole affair.

Billie dragged Ethelbert around the hall. Repeatedly the Beamer gallants bumped into him. Once he lost his footing and fell prone, floundering about wildly.

"Come here and I'll pick you up," volunteered Red-head, as he glided past.

"What's the matter with you—drunk or something?" queried another humorist, as Billie assisted Ethelbert to his feet.

Perspiring and wild-eyed, Ethelbert managed to survive his first waltz. The moment Billie was seated, he hurried into the anteroom and fairly stormed the water-cooler.

The next dance found Ethelbert a trifle reluctant. Still, her instructions had been plain. Again he hurled himself through the crowd. She smiled and led him into a quadrille where he quickly became a menace to life and limb.

The cavaliers, considering a quadrille a sop to the aged and infirm, drew back into the anteroom for a council of war.

"That poor stand-up-and-fall-down is goin' to take every dance with her," growled Red-head. "Somethin' ought to be done."

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"Leave it to me," snarled a heavy-shouldered, beetle-eyed youth. "I'll fix him."

Happy smiled contentedly. Billie could not hold him responsible if Red and the rest of the disappointed ones took Mr. Binns in hand.

They had not long to wait. The water-cooler was Ethelbert's Mecca, and after the quadrille he sought it with the blind eagerness of any fanatic.

As he raised the glass to his lips, he became aware of a wide-shouldered, beetle-eyed youth staring at him malignantly. Slowly he lowered the glass.

"You want anything out of me?" inquired Beetle-eyes, whipping out a jack-knife.

Ethelbert shook his head.

Some one passed Beetle-eyes an old pie-tin. This he thrust into Ethelbert's hand.

"Hold that," he snarled, "or I'll open you like a fish."

Ethelbert tightly clutched the tin, admitting freely to himself that he preferred holding a pie-tin to being opened like a fish.

Red-head now gave himself a dainty air, and minced across the room and lightly flicked the ashes from his cigaret into the pie-tin.

Others sauntered up and flicked their cigaret ashes into the tin, while they discussed polite nothings, and pretended they were bored willie-boys attending some society function.

The orchestra broke into a flippant and enticing trot. Ethelbert's tormenters rushed into the hall, but Beetle-eyes remained to guard the human ash-tray.

Billie, whirling past the anteroom door in Happy's arms, glimpsed Ethelbert, rigidly erect, holding the pie-tin as a soldier holds a card-salver at a military ball.

Happy gladly gave her the details. She sighed. Would Ethelbert never become a man? Was all her work in vain?

AGAIN the Beamerites went into close council. Something was said about the subject under discussion being the nephew of Jack Watts. One youth remarked that he had heard the stranger had run a Mexican out of town.

"That mows no hay with me," declared Red-head in a heavy whisper. "Let's get busy."

More whispering, and they were ready for action.

Beetle-eyes returned to Ethelbert and found fault with the way he held the tin. Happy Jack entered and thoughtfully closed the hall door.

"I don't like the way you're takin' advantage of this feller," Red-head suddenly snarled at Beetle-eyes.

Beetle-eyes closed and pocketed his knife.

"Just what do you think you're goin' to do?" he inquired ominously. "When did you get the right to tell me what to do?"

Red threw all restraint to the winds.

"Let me at him, boys!" he yelled.

"Come on," invited Beetle-eyes. "I'll drive your beak around on the back of your neck!"

Loud cries here of pacifists.

"Don't start nothin', boys!"

"Aw, Red, don't hit him!"

The red-head now gave a good imitation of a wild man. He struck at Beetle-eyes, who dodged. The next moment Ethelbert was in the center of the deliberately planned free-for-all fight. For a time he made no effort to escape the blows that were rained on him from all sides. Then it dawned on him that he might be knocked down and trampled into a jelly. Fear gave him the strength of five men, and he began knocking right and left. Red received a back-handed clout on the ear that sent him from the mêlée, sure that he was deafened for life.

Blind with panic, Ethelbert did not see the grins on the faces of the struggling men. He bunted, kicked, clawed and pounded.

Some boy had left a greasewood cudgel in a corner of the anteroom, and Ethelbert's clawing hand came in contact with the club. He kicked a clear space in front of him, and, swinging the club, charged toward the door.

Beetle-eyes made a desperate attempt to dodge the swinging club, but those back of him hindered his movements, and the greasewood whacked against his thick skull. His eyes set in his head and his knees bent. Ethelbert's club came around on a return trip, and again found Beetle-eyes' skull in the way. This time Beetle-eyes struck the floor.

Panic now seized the jokers. Their faked free-for-all fight was becoming a serious mêlée. A whack from a greasewood club offers little incentive for laughter, and the stranger was certainly landing some vicious blows.

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The young men of Beamer were not students of the psychology of fright. They did not know that fear had goaded their wild-eyed victim to desperate action.

With a strangled yell Ethelbert charged. The crowd stampeded through the stairway door to the landing. Fortunately the railing held, or there might have been some broken necks to chronicle.

Ethelbert was now unable to use his club, but he plunged headlong down the stairway, taking with him a mass of tumbling, clawing youths. They landed in a frightful mix-up at the foot of the stairway. Ethelbert popped up like a jack-in-the-box and began whacking heads. Howls and groans shattered the nocturnal stillness.

The fat marshal of Beamer came wheezing into action. Ethelbert viewed everything that moved as his mortal enemy, and promptly whacked the marshal. The officer reeled and swayed. Ethelbert kicked free of clutching hands. The marshal was in the way, and again the greasewood stick descended on his head. As the marshal fell, some one seized Ethelbert's leg, detaining him long enough for him to glimpse the big star on the fallen marshal's chest.

He had killed an officer. As a drowning man reviews in a flash his past life, Ethelbert visioned in an infinitesimal fraction of a second, the trial, the conviction, the sentence, the last night on earth, the march to the gallows, the black cap, the springing of the trap.

"No, no, no, not that!" he screamed; and sprang clear of the swaying forms about him.

Then, like some fleeing specter of the night, he ran straight into the desert.

Happy, in the meantime, had given Billie the particulars of the fight, and she was in the anteroom when the bruised and battered jokesters, one by one, straggled in.

The marshal, somewhat dazed, was the last to enter.

Red, being a fair-minded youth, confessed to the officer that they had "just been havin' a little fun with the new guy."

"You may call it fun," growled the officer, tenderly caressing his head, "but I'd call it the work of a bunch that ain't got enough brains to run a chicken. I've a notion to run you all in."

They hastened to soothe him, giving him cigars and eagerly proffering water-soaked handkerchiefs to cool his throbbing head. Gradually his grumbles diminished, and at last he laughed.

"Well, anyway, boys," he twitted, "you can't complain that the stranger didn't give you a run for your trouble."

Billie edged through the crowd.

"Did he strike you?" she asked the officer.

"Strike me!" he echoed, comically. "Why, Miss Billie, he knocked me cold as a wedge! And, from what these jokers say, he's left for parts unknown."

Billie drew back from the crowd. This was a serious matter. Knowing Ethelbert's mental processes, she visioned him fleeing through the night, with the demons of fear and dread yapping at his heels. The poor boy had been frightened out of his wits, or he would not have struck the marshal. She sighed heavily. Had all her efforts to remodel Ethelbert been in vain? Apparently he was still the slave of fear.

Anxiety for his welfare shut out all other thoughts. She must find him.

She turned to Happy and complained, for the benefit of the crowd, of "a terrible headache," and asked him to bring her wraps.

A few minutes later she was bidding the boy good night at the door of her room.

Hurriedly she donned her riding garb, and sought the livery-stable where she roused the sleepy gawk who, under her sharp orders, quickly saddled her pony.

She was convinced that Ethelbert had fled beyond the city limits. He might possibly be in the cottonwoods.

IX

IN BEAMER'S Little Mexico, sequestered in the shack of a friend, Manuel Garcia scowled at a scrawled letter his host had brought him.

The letter was postmarked "Three Trails" and read:

> Good signs here. Meet me at Skeleton Cañon in 2 weeks. Wait in cañon for me if you get there first. J and C with me. Be sure and be there. Big deal. Bank on you.
>
> H. at 3 trails.

Expanded, the signature "H" was Higg, the cognomen of an old desert-rover whom several sheriffs yearned to adorn with handcuffs. "J" and "C" were Joe and Charlie, two young men whose penchant

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for cattle-rustling had aroused the ire of the minions of the law.

Garcia interpreted "Good signs here" to mean money. Higg was planning to relieve some one in the town of Three Trails of a large amount of money. But why had Higg underscored the word "bank"? Ah, a bank—a place where money was kept. Higg meant to rob the bank at Three Trails.

Garcia rolled a cigaret and darkly pondered the letter. The robbing of the bank at Three Trails would not be an easy job. Yet he did not desire to antagonize Higg by a refusal, or by ignoring the letter. Higg knew too much. If he failed to meet Higg at Skeleton Cañon, he knew that the outlaw would put the death-mark on him. Sooner or later, Higg would "get" him. Higg knew that he, Manuel Garcia, had murdered Jespon, the mining man. Higg had only to write a note to the nearest sheriff, charging him with the murder of Jespon.

Arrested, the Mexican knew that the lack of witnesses would not save him from a life sentence or possibly the gallows. Even if he escaped the clutches of the law, he could find no refuge among the "wanted" men in the desert or across the Mexican border. Higg would make known to the lawless ones that Manuel Garcia was not to be trusted. Lastly, if he did not answer this summons, the outlaw chief would shoot him on sight.

The Mexican shivered. He had always feared Higg. There was to him something remorseless about the little, bald-headed man with the fish eyes.

And to hold him in Beamer, bound with the withes of desire and love of revenge, was the two-gun girl. Meeting Higg at Skeleton Cañon meant giving up all hope of dragging her in the dust. That thrice-cursed tenderfoot was in the way, too.

The Mexican shook his head puzzledly. He wanted the girl, and did not desire to ignore the summons of Higg. He had no plan, yet was loth to leave Beamer lest he miss some opportunity of getting her in his power. He was not so vain as to imagine that she would ever favor him, and he had a wholesome respect for her ability to defend herself. Trickery would best answer the purpose, but he was unable to work out any feasible plan.

Beamer now held no soft future for him. He had hoped to pass a few months in ease and affluence, but his unfortunate clash with Jack Watts had prejudiced the various saloonkeepers against him and barred him from the games of chance controlled by white men. There remained only the Mexican resort where they played for petty stakes.

And the shaking, rabbit-eyed tenderfoot had run him off the main street. If he slipped a knife into the fearful one, every white man in the town would take his trail. No, it would be best to ignore the tenderfoot and concentrate on some plan to secure the girl. But what sort of a plan? He wagged his black head hopelessly.

Then, there was the matter of time. The letter had been on the road nearly a week. He would have to start tomorrow to reach Skeleton Cañon and be certain of not missing Higg.

But he had no definite plan. He smoked many cigarets and stalked about the shack, thinking more about the girl than of action.

At nightfall he found that he could not longer endure the loneliness of the little shack and sought the Mexican gambling-house, where he lost steadily for several hours.

Disgusted with his lack of luck, he left the saloon, resolved to seek the oblivion of sleep. Perhaps, after a night's rest, some plan would come to him.

Returning to the Mexican section which lay beyond the livery-stable, he halted abruptly as the light of a lantern in the hand of a stable boy disclosed to him the two-gun girl mounting her pony. He watched her as she rode from the barn and turned into the desert road.

Apparently opportunity was beckoning. She was alone and, doubtless, on her way to her father's camp. There was a possibility of catching her off her guard. Following her would dovetail with meeting Higg. If he failed to overpower her in the desert, he could go on to Skeleton Cañon.

He darted through the shadows and into the shed back of his friend's shack, where he hurriedly saddled his horse. Then he entered the shack and "borrowed" his friend's six-shooter and ammunition-belt and a goodly supply of jerked beef.

Cautiously he rode from the Mexican settlement, passing in the rear of the stable, and striking the desert road not far from

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the cottonwoods in which Billie had hoped to find Ethelbert.

In the vague moonlight the Mexican saw the girl as she topped a slight rise.

She had thoroughly scouted the cottonwoods, and then concluded that Ethelbert had fled to her father's camp. To make sure, she dismounted, and on her hands and knees "felt out" his track in the desert road. Her sensitive fingers told her that those smooth, sharply defined tracks were the prints of Ethelbert's smooth-soled new shoes. She knew that under no circumstances would he leave the road; he was too new to the desert for that.

As she mounted, she glimpsed a dark blot on the road back of her, but gave it little thought. Doubtless some man making a night ride.

She urged her pony into a gallop and soon sighted the fleeing Ethelbert. The sound of hoofbeats back of him meant only one thing to the self-made fugitive: an officer of the law coming to arrest him for the murder of the man with the star on his chest. He broke into a heavy run. Then he heard his pursuer call, and his dazed faculties gradually comprehended that some woman was shouting his name.

"It's Billie," Reason told him faintly; and he halted abruptly.

"What in the name of common sense is the matter with you?" she lashed out, as she pulled her pony back nearly on his haunches. "Where do you think you are going?"

The shaking youth managed to convey to her that he believed himself a murderer.

"So that's why you're racing through the desert like a scared jack-rabbit?"

SHE wanted to laugh, but the drooping disconsolate figure touched pity, and pity ever lays a restraining hand on mirth.

"Now, listen, Ethelbert," she said, as though talking to a child. "You merely gave the Beamer marshal a good crack on the head. He is very much alive, and you are in no danger of being arrested."

"Thank Heaven," he bleated, "I'm not a murderer."

"Don't talk that way," she snapped. "You sound like a near-hero in a play."

"But I'm so glad," he gurgled, touched with hysteria. "So glad—so relieved. I have suffered everything. I thought—I thought I had killed a man."

This was too much for Billie's woman's heart. She dismounted and began smoothing back Ethelbert's damp forelock. Under the soothing caress of her hand, he gradually regained control of his nerves. He even found strength to raise his arms. He found that he could not hold his arms clear of her with any degree of comfort and so he rested them against her. Recollections of his sufferings caused him to tighten his arms.

She continued to caress his brow, and by some miracle the suffering he had endured became vague and remote. He discovered that the closer he pressed her to him the more vague and remote became the memories of that awful night. As his arms tightened about her, she found it inconvenient to continue caressing his brow, and so her hand dropped naturally on his shoulder. Then, following the course of least resistance, her arm crept around his neck. This brought her face close to his, and memory ceased to function so far as Ethelbert was concerned. Also, he shed weariness as he would a frayed garment.

"Poor boy," she crooned. "You've had a terrible night. Tell me all about it. Were you afraid in the fight?"

She felt a shudder run through him.

"Yes," he confessed, "I was afraid."

"Then you fought to escape and not to show them that you were a man?"

"Yes," in a faint whisper.

"Will you never fight because you think you are right? Will you never become a man, Ethelbert? Do you think a coward has a right to hold me in his arms?"

All this in a low, sorrowful voice.

Then, oh, then the miracle of love! Ethelbert, for the first time in his life, saw himself as he really was—a slave of fear. No, he had no right to hold her in his arms.

His arms dropped to his sides, and he stood, a forlorn and dejected figure.

"What are you going to do?" she demanded, stepping back from him.

It was the woman's question. Sooner or later that question is shot at every man, and there is no dodging it.

"What are you going to do?" she impatiently repeated.

"I thought I would return to your father's camp."

The old weariness had returned, and,

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now that she was not in his arms, fear lurked in the shadows. In the town danger stalked the streets—wild blond women, fierce Mexicans, battling youths. In the desert was comparative security. Surely she could not expect him to return to the terrible town.

She turned to her pony.

"You're hopeless, Ethelbert, utterly hopeless."

She swung into the saddle, and for several moments surveyed the being she had hoped to remodel. After all she could not cast him aside as she would a clay figure. There was no denying the pathos of him, the appeal to her maternal instinct. She would have to watch over him as a mother watches over her weakling child.

She decided not to tell him that the free-for-all fight had been staged for his benefit. To enlighten him would doubtless do more harm than good. It would only give Fear a chance to bleat in his ear—

"If that was a sham battle, what would the real thing be?"

Slowly she turned her pony.

"Nothing left to do now except return to Beamer and get the burros," she said finally, surrendering to what she deemed the inevitable. "You seem determined to lead a retired life."

He did not offer to detain her.

"You can wait for me at Eleven Palms," she went on, apathetically. Life now had little to offer her save responsibility for the guidance of this helpless male creature who, despite all his fear and purblind blunders, had found the way to her heart. "I will arrive at the Palms at sundown or shortly after."

She glanced back at him, faintly hopeful that he would offer to return to town and rid his soul of fear. But he made no move.

A thought for his comfort came to her. Poor boy, he was bareheaded. His pathetic, little straw hat still reposed on a chair in the dance-hall. She guided her pony close to him, and placed her hat on his head.

Then a sudden desire for action surged up within her. She whirled her pony, and urged him into a furious gallop.

"She is gone!" the desert told him. "She is gone, and you—you are still afraid!"

"Wait, wait!" he cried. "I'll go with you—I'll fight—anything!"

But she did not hear him, and the sudden flare of manhood died down. Why hunt trouble? Some day, perhaps, he would return to Beamer and whip one of those battling youths—some day—some day.

"What you want," whispered Fear, the wily and ingratiating, "is a nice quiet life where there is no struggle, no danger and no pain. For that sort of life, you are willing to be good, to be perfectly proper. It is not nice to fight. Good people do not fight. Just be good and everything will come out all right."

Then Experience bawled rudely:

"How do you expect to hold a girl like Billie? Don't you know that this country is full of men who would fight to the last gasp for a smile from her?"

The misery of the pacifist who loves a beautiful woman overwhelmed him. Always would rude, rough men look at Billie with bold, longing eyes. To love her meant one long struggle with mankind. This was a hard cruel world.

"Hullo, there!"

Ethelbert whirled to see a horseman emerging from a big wash that curved in toward the road.

It was Garcia. From the cover of the wash, he had not failed to note the lover-like attitude of the two figures in the road. Who was the man whom the two-gun girl had overtaken and favored with her caresses? And why had she doubled back toward Beamer?

When he recognized Ethelbert, he was tempted to exact immediate revenge for that gun-play on the main street of Beamer. But, on second thought, he decided to pretend regret for the troublesome past, and thus gain the information he desired. After that, it being apparent that the tenderfoot was unarmed, he would amuse himself as he saw fit.

Ethelbert's recognition of the Mexican was not pleasant to contemplate. He started back, his fingers picking at the empty air.

"GOING far?" Garcia asked. Then, before Ethelbert could gather his wits to answer: "You and me had some trouble. I had been drinking. I was to blame. I say what is past is gone, and that's all there is to it. What do you say?"

"Why, I guess—it's—all right," stammered the ingenuous Ethelbert, thankful to escape trouble.

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"That's good," commented the Mexican.

He struck a match to light his cigaret, and smiled broadly at Ethelbert. The smile served not only to disarm his victim but also to lift his huge mustache clear of the flame.

"The lady—she go back to town, hey?" Garcia queried, with feigned indifference. "Forgot something? Maybe come back by-and-by?"

"Yes," babbled Ethelbert, the innocent, "she expects to meet me at Eleven Palms tomorrow night."

The Mexican devoted several moments to deep thought, and then offered:

"I can give you a lift to Eleven Palms. My horse will carry double. Better than walking, I should say. Come on and ride. We had our trouble, but it's all over with. No hard feelings now."

"Why, yes, thank you," Ethelbert replied, now more at ease, his ingenuous heart responding to the seemingly frank manliness of the Mexican. "I'm sure," he added naively, "that, if you regret your past actions, I shall hold no ill feeling against you."

"Very good," grunted the Mexican. "Get up back of me. There's a stirrup to put your foot in."

Garcia hitched his gun around to his belt buckle, but Ethelbert, occupied with settling himself on the horse's croup, did not notice the precautionary move.

The first half mile Ethelbert gripped the Mexican's arms, and then some revulsion at close contact made him determine to hold his precarious seat without touching the man in front of him. Garcia heaved a sigh of relief when the pressure of the white man's hands no longer oppressed him. Racial revulsion is not confined to the Anglo-Saxon.

They arrived at Eleven Palms at dawn.

Garcia looked about him, a gleam of calculation in his dark eyes. He watered his horse, and then picketed the animal beyond a thick clump of mesquite on the far side of the camp.

The Mexican shared his dried beef with Ethelbert, but there was little talk between them.

"We'd better take a sleep," Garcia suggested, after they had washed down the dried beef with spring water. "I'll be going on tonight." He smiled darkly. "It is easier on my horse—riding at night."

Ethelbert made no comment. He was sore and fagged. Finding a shady spot beneath a palm, he sprawled out, placed Billie's hat over his eyes, and was soon sound asleep.

The Mexican came over and looked down at the sleeping white man with dark, hostile eyes. His mouth twisted into a vicious sneer, and he shrugged his shoulders.

Then he walked out to the road, and looked back at the clump of mesquite that screened the horse. He seemed to be in doubt about something, his plan of action unsettled. Returning to Ethelbert he noted the hat over the slumberer's eyes. Cautiously he bent over and closely examined it. When he discovered the pin-holes in the crown, he frowned puzzledly. Then he smiled; he was beginning to see his way clear. He drew back to his saddle.

"A siesta," he muttered, as he pillowed his head on the saddle, "and then——"

Ethelbert, despite the flies, slept until mid-afternoon.

He sat up to stare sleepily at the Mexican who was seated Turk-fashion nearby.

The Mexican rolled a cigaret, and politely queried—

"Get good sleep?"

Ethelbert nodded and put on the hat.

"Pretty hat you got there," observed Garcia. "Looks like a woman's."

"It is," Ethelbert admitted a little sheepishly. "I lost mine—that is, I left it somewhere, and Miss Seaver loaned me hers."

"Look out somebody don't take you for a girl," twitted the Mexican, his eyes narrowing.

Ethelbert arose and brushed the sand from his wrinkled clothes.

The Mexican's face twitched. His plan was now complete in every detail.

"How much you weigh?" he asked abruptly. " 'Bout the same as me? Wear the same size clothes, hey?"

"I should judge so," Ethelbert replied, pausing in his brushing to size up his interlocutor, and considering the rapid-fire questions mere friendly talk.

Before sundown Ethelbert made several trips to the road, hoping to sight Billie. Garcia, in the mean time, busied himself with preparations for a quick departure. Returning from the road, Ethelbert found the Mexican saddling his horse.

"Don't see the lady coming yet, hey?" Garcia queried as he tightened the cinch.

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Ethelbert shook his head as the Mexican gave him a dark questioning glance.

"I'll go have a look in a moment," Garcia volunteered. "If she come at sundown, she late now."

They walked down to the road, now in the afterglow, a trace of deceptive gray across the dark breast of the desert.

"Not in sight yet," muttered the Mexican.

Billie was nearing Eleven Palms, but the watchers had been unable to see her because of her having turned from the main road into a deep, smooth wash, a convenient cut-off not known to the casual desert traveler.

Ethelbert followed the Mexican back to the horse. Suddenly Garcia whipped out his gun and leveled it at the white man's stomach.

"Get off your clothes—quick," he hissed.

The only thought that entered the astounded Ethelbert's mind was that the Mexican coveted his new suit.

Garcia snarled out brief orders which Ethelbert, seeing no reason to invite murder, promptly obeyed.

"Turn around. Pass back your coat and pants. I want that hat, too."

ETHELBERT flinched when he felt Billie's hat snatched from his head. The Mexican was welcome to the new suit, but her hat— Then, with a great effort, he put fear aside, and attempted to think. What was the Mexican's purpose?

"She'll never know the difference," he heard Garcia exult.

Harm to Billie—that was it! And he had had so little sense, so little comprehension of character, as to trust this snake. The thought of Billie in the power of the brute back of him was like a flame to lick the callowness from his mind. He must think—plan—act.

A lilt of song came drifting across the wastes—

"My brave cavalier
Will ever be true,
No coward's heart has he——"

"Billie!" gasped Ethelbert; and whirled to find Garcia arrayed in the fawn-colored suit, and with Billie's hat pulled down over his eyes.

A full comprehension of the Mexican's purpose crashed into Ethelbert's mind. Garcia proposed to impersonate him to throw Billie off her guard. The words of her song were like unseen hands to hurl him into action. With one blind, frantic effort, he tore fear from his soul, and hurled himself at the Mexican.

Garcia merely stepped aside and brought the long barrel of his six-shooter down on the head of the charging white man. Ethelbert crumpled to the ground.

The Mexican dragged his unconscious victim back of a thick clump of greasewood. Then he ran to a point near the entrance to the camp, and entered a little opening in the mesquite. Halting with his back to the camp entrance, he covered his mustache with his hand, and bent over slightly.

Billie, entering the camp, saw, in the vague half-light a bent figure in the mesquite. She caught the gleam of the buckle on her hat.

"Ethelbert," she called. "What's the matter?"

A groan issued from the curiously bent figure.

Poor Ethelbert was hurt.

She fairly tumbled from her pony, and ran along the wing of mesquite that thickened back from the camp entrance. She turned into the opening and bounded to the side of the bent figure. Before she could speak the Mexican had seized her.

She fought valiantly, writhing, twisting, kicking, but Garcia pressed her to the ground, keeping a remorseless grip on her wrists. When she was flat on her back, he placed a knee on one arm, and held the other twisted under her head, while he relieved her of her automatics.

"There," he laughed, as he lifted her to her feet, "the little rattlesnake woman has no fangs now."

He pushed her ahead of him, and drew his gun.

"Do as I tell you," he warned her, "or you'll be roped pretty pronto."

Believing that he would not shoot her, she sprang forward and darted across the camp, hoping to reach the shelter of the palms. The clump of greasewood, back of which Garcia had dragged his victim, was between the fleeing Billie and the first group of palms.

She halted abruptly as Ethelbert, dazed and bleeding, crawled from the screen of greasewood.

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She could not see his face, but she could hear him moaning her name.

Garcia came up, and slanted his gun down at Ethelbert who was making feeble attempts to gain his feet.

The Mexican drew closer to the girl.

"Tell him," he whispered, "that you are going on a little trip with me. Tell him, or leave him for the coyotes."

Ethelbert was now on his knees. The girl bent over him.

"I'm going on a little trip with this man," she told him in a strained, unnatural voice.

Ethelbert raised his eyes, striving to read in her face a refutation of her terrible words; but, in the gloom, her features were vague and indistinct.

"Come," ordered the Mexican. "Get on your horse."

Slowly the girl backed away from Ethelbert.

For a moment Garcia darkly debated, half-minded to kill the white man. He raised his gun.

"No; not that!" she cried wildly. "I'll go with you!"

The Mexican smiled sardonically at the wailing note of despair in her voice, and lowered his gun. He would spare the harmless, helpless white fool. Later, if she resisted too much, he would threaten to return and kill her gringo lover.

X

GARCIA knew the penalty for abducting a white woman, but the fumes of desire obscured the thoughts of trailing, relentless vengeance. Still, he did not forget to warn Ethelbert that, with the first glimpse of a pursuer, he would send the girl into the land of shadows.

"If you want her to live," he burned into the mind of the swaying, helpless Ethelbert, "don't start any one after us."

The he bound Billie's arms with a bridle rein, and lifted her into her saddle. She made no resistance, being too coldly thoughtful to wear away her strength with futile struggles. She had fought him at first in a desperate endeavor to reach her automatics, but, now that she was disarmed, she conserved her strength.

The Mexican's next move was to discard the fawn-colored suit. This gave Ethelbert such a feeling of relief that he almost forgot the black fate that Billie faced. To be decently clothed still meant much to him. As yet he was unable to throw off all the tidy habits of civilization. Fear had been given some hard jolts, but he was not yet weaned from his trousers. His head throbbed, and he was sick and dizzy, but his mind concentrated on the gladsome thought of recovering his clothes. Without his trousers he was unable to think, much less to act. This is something for the psychologist to muse over.

Garcia rode clear of the mesquite, leading Billie's pony. The pony resented the hackamore the Mexican had twisted around his nose, and was stubbornly opposed to leaving Eleven Palms, with its water and green grass. The burros followed readily enough, but the pony hung back on the long rope, swung around clumps of greasewood, and exhibited a contrariness that brought a gleam of hope to the girl.

"Make him lead up," yelled the Mexican, as the pony swung around a clump of greasewood and settled back on the rope.

"How can I, when my arms are tied?" she retorted, the gleam of hope growing brighter. "My pony is not used to such treatment, and you can't do anything with him this way."

The Mexican was intent on reaching the desert hills that lay a few miles north of Eleven Palms. There, in some secluded cañon, he would make this white woman cling to his knees, and beg—beg—beg.

But this cursed pony. They would be all night reaching the hills at this rate. With a snarl of impatience, he rode back and unbound the girl's arms, and removed the rope from the pony's nose.

"Now, come on," he growled, "and don't try no tricks."

Billie, as they rode on, concentrated on the thought of escape. The rope was still around her pony's neck; it would be folly to attempt to escape afoot, and she had no weapon of any kind. Weapon? Gun? No. Knife? No. Club? No. Rock? No. What was there within reach that she could use? Then, suddenly, a plan came to her.

"My saddle is slipping back," she complained. "The cinch is loose. I can feel that it is loose."

She bent over, and seemed to be occupied with testing the cinch.

The Mexican cursed under his breath, and flung himself from his horse. He struck

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the ground with sufficient force to jar Billie's hat from his head. He did not pause to pick it up, but ran back to tighten the cinch.

As he bent over and groped for the cinch, Billie swung one of the heavy iron stirrups, which the Beamer blacksmith had made to her order, over and down with every atom of strength she possessed. The stirrup struck the Mexican on the back of the head—that part where the base of the brain is located—and he fell against the pony. Again the stirrup thudded against his skull, and the pony sprang clear of him, and he dropped heavily. Even as the pony sprang, the girl made a flying leap from the saddle, and, in one desperate lunge, secured the stunned Mexican's gun.

And then she laughed. She was more than a match for any man now.

The Mexican was lying flat on his face.

"Don't move," the girl warned, "or I'll kill you."

Cautiously she approached the prostrate man. Pressing the gun against his side, she recovered her automatics from his hip pockets. Now, with those deadly little weapons resting in their buckskin-lined pockets, she felt prepared for any emergency.

To the victor belongs the spoils. She resolved to set the Mexican afoot. Not having the heart to leave him without water, she removed his big canteen from the saddle-horn. Then she felt in the saddle-pockets and discovered the dried beef. She would leave him the dried beef and the canteen of water.

Garcia had now turned over on his side, and was making some effort to rise to a sitting posture.

"Here, *hombre*," said the girl, "is your canteen and dried beef. It would be a good plan for you to make yourself a very scarce article in this country. When I tell my daddy of your work tonight, he will certainly take your trail. All there is left for you to do is to leave this part of the desert and not look back."

Garcia's mind was now sufficiently clear to understand that she had the drop on him.

He gained his knees, and mumbled something about his horse.

"No horse for you," mocked the girl. "You're going to try walking for a time." She picked up her hat. "You're going to try walking for a few days until you learn that there are some things that you can not do."

She transferred the rope to Garcia's horse, and mounted her pony.

"I ought to kill you, I know," she said in parting, "but I'll have to leave that job for some man. *Adios, hombre.* Remember, keep moving."

The girl turned her pony.

"Don't move until you count up a hundred," she called back. "I don't want to shoot you, but I will if you follow me."

Garcia did not move. He was not so dazed now that he could not recall her gun-magic.

He watched her disappear in the gloom, leading his horse. The burros moved their heads irresolutely, and then jogged after her, their packs swaying grotesquely. He was alone.

ETHELBERT, following the abduction of Billie, made haste to draw on his trousers. That important work accomplished, he sought the waterhole where he bathed his throbbing head and strove to think of some plan for the rescue of the girl he loved.

What could he do? He saw himself plodding back to Beamer to rouse the town, but decided that such a procedure would only hasten Billie's doom. Had not the Mexican vowed that he would kill her at the first sign of pursuit?

But he must do something. He could not sit still and groan. Ultimately he would have to face her father. He could see that terrible man clutch his throat, and hear him thunder—

"What were you doing while that Mexican was taking my girl?"

Then he thought of leaving the desert—getting away from it all. But manhood asserted itself, and obliterated that craven thought.

There then remained only one course: he must follow them—follow them until he dropped. He might overtake them and rush the Mexican. He would doubtless be killed, but death would be preferable to facing her father. He must start now; every moment was precious. Poor Billie, in the hands of that brute!

In a sudden frenzy he lurched through the mesquite and into the road. There he halted irresolutely, hesitating to leave the beaten trail. Suppose he attempted to find

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the Mexican in that vague, pathless waste that stretched north to those barren hills, and failed—and found no water—and perished miserably?

Fate or something was hectoring him again. Just because she was a girl and he was a man, he had to make every possible effort to rescue her. But why? Ah, fear—fear for the loss of that which men called self-respect. Also, there was her father. He could hear the remorseless Bill snarl:

"You miserable whelp, you didn't try to save my girl! There was only one thing for a man to do—die! You come to me alive, you yellow dog! But you won't live long!"

He imagined Seaver's great fingers sinking into his neck.

And lastly he loved her.

"No, no," he chattered aloud, "I'll try to save her!"

He staggered on through the gloom, veering east of the point where Garcia had been knocked cold by a long, heavy iron stirrup in the hand of a determined and very muscular girl.

BILLIE dashed into camp, calling—

"Ethelbert, Ethelbert, Ethelbert!"

She sprang from her horse and searched for him, calling wildly the while. At last she started a fire, but the flames disclosed no Ethelbert. She looked for the fawn-colored suit and, failing to find it, concluded that he had dressed and gone on to her father's camp. She rode some distance down the road in the direction she thought he had gone, calculating the time required for him to walk the distance she had ridden from the camp.

She lighted matches and searched for his footprints in the road. No, he was wandering around in the desert. She returned to the camp and piled wood on the fire. Snatching a blazing stick from the flames she ran out to the road, and finally struck his trail. He was headed toward the desert hills in a vain attempt to rescue her. Poor Ethelbert, he had courage after all.

She decided to wait until daylight before going after him. He could come to no harm, she thought, and she could quickly overtake him when there was light enough for trailing. If she now zigzagged back and forth over the country between Eleven Palms and the desert hills, and failed to find him, she would be compelled to return to the camp at dawn to pick up his trail. In that dark waste, rough, and crisscrossed with washes, there was no guessing the course of a man whose sense of direction was not to be trusted. Then there was the possibility of his returning to camp. Desert-wisdom counseled waiting for daylight.

Dawn found Garcia approaching a cañon that debouched from the desert hills. He was nearing an island of boulders in the mouth of the cañon. Ethelbert, bedraggled and worn, was also approaching that "island," but on the side directly opposite the Mexican. The two men nearly collided as they rounded the northern extremity of the great heap of boulders. Both were startled out of their wits. Ethelbert veered off like a frightened jack-rabbit. This gave Garcia an opportunity to supplant fear with rage. Here was that thrice-cursed tenderfoot out looking for him. He gave a wild yell, and plunged after the fleeing Ethelbert who expected every moment to feel a bullet crash into his spine.

Wheezing like a wind-broken horse, Ethelbert dashed up the cañon, with Garcia lumbering a few yards in the rear. Suddenly Ethelbert realized that he was approaching a wall of rock down the face of which was the stain of a rainy-season waterfall. The way was barred. Why was he running? Why not turn and have it all over with?

Halting suddenly, he whirled and charged blindly at his pursuer. But Garcia had the greater momentum, and Ethelbert was knocked flat, the back of his head striking a rock. He felt his strength ooze from him.

Garcia kicked him brutally. Ethelbert attempted to protect his head, but the kicks of the Mexican battered down his guard, and at last he was forced to give up.

"Got enough?" howled the Mexican, kicking him again and again.

A thin cry of despair broke from the lips of the prostrate white man.

"Good," grunted Garcia, taking a pull at his canteen. "You're going to be my dog from now on. Get up."

Ethelbert managed to rise to his feet. The Mexican hung his big canteen on the bleeding and bruised white man, and hurled him toward a sheep trail that led up the side of the cañon and past the waterfall.

"You're going to be my burro, now!" he yelled. "Move *pronto!*"

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He knocked Ethelbert down, and kicked him viciously. Having the victor's advantage—choice of action—the Mexican did not propose to give the white man time or opportunity to regain his equilibrium. Garcia was well aware of the fact that, once a man's spirit is broken, he rarely recovers. He was intent on reducing this white man's spirit to the level of a cringing dog's, and he seemed to be enjoying complete success.

Ethelbert's progress up that narrow trail was largely on all fours. He had no thought of resistance; his tenderly nurtured ego only contemplated an escape of the body from torture. Yet, in his subconscious mind, the steel of Anglo-Saxon heritage had struck the flint of suffering, and thrown off a deadly and potent spark of anger. He was not yet cognizant of this spark, nor aware that each blow he received was as fuel to fatten it to vengeful flame.

"I'll make you glad to kiss my feet," hissed the Mexican, as they passed the waterfall. "White man—full-blooded white man, hey! Quick I make you full-blooded dog!"

Garcia's Indian blood was now in full flood. It delighted him to see the white man dodge his blows, and plunge forward under the stimulus of well-directed kicks. Also, he was venting his rage at being disarmed and set afoot by a girl.

Doubtless, he would not have wasted so much time in venting his rage on an apparently hopeless white craven, had he known that that same courageous and self-reliant girl had left Eleven Palms at daybreak and was now nearing the desert hills.

Approaching the mouth of the cañon, automatics ready for action, Billie noted the strange tracks following Ethelbert's. At the waterfall she halted and debated. Apparently the two men had followed the narrow game trail past the waterfall. The trail was too narrow to be negotiated by a horse, and there was nothing to be gained by following them on foot.

Who was it whose long steps showed that he was hurrying after Ethelbert? She rode back to the island of boulders and followed the strange tracks until she came to the place where she had struck down Garcia.

"The Mexican!" she exclaimed.

She could see it all now. Garcia had surprized Ethelbert, and there had been a struggle. The Mexican had been the victor and was driving Ethelbert to some resort in the desert hills. But there were only so many waterholes on the north side of the desert hills. There was the spring of a homesteader, just over the range, a hot spring near some mud volcanoes, then one waterhole farther on to the east.

She resolved to return to Eleven Palms where she had left the burros securely picketed, and then, with full camp equipment and provisions, follow the south side of the desert hills east, until she was even with the last waterhole on the north. Then she would cut across and intercept Garcia. There was only one direction that he could go from that last waterhole—north to the timbered mountains. If she failed to strike his trail at that point, she would turn west toward the homesteader's spring.

This time she would show the Mexican no mercy. She would take him to Beamer and turn him over to the sheriff. She could forget his treatment of her, but, when she thought of the brute driving Ethelbert across the wastes, she became as merciless as a tigress. Poor Ethelbert, she had been cruel and thoughtless toward him. She had harrowed his soul with that female impersonator, and she had deliberately caused him much suffering. Still, her intentions had been good; she wanted him to become a hardy, self-reliant man.

That night she camped in a cañon on the south side of the desert range. There, amid wild palms, she built her little cooking-fire.

"Got everything here," she told her pony. "Beautiful little spring, and good grass for you and everything—" a sorrowful, tender light crept into her eyes—"everything but Ethelbert, poor boy."

XI

SINCE leaving the crest of the desert range, Garcia had been menacing his victim with his big jack-knife. Now, as they reached the homesteader's shack, and Ethelbert dropped down in the shade, the Mexican stood over him, clicking the knife-blade viciously.

"Get your wind," he advised darkly. "You're going to be a good pack-burro."

The Mexican quickly broke into the

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shack where he found a rifle and ammunition and a small stock of provisions. The former he eagerly appropriated and loaded the magazine.

Returning to the doorway, he sent a bullet so close to Ethelbert's head that the flying dirt and sand almost blinded the white man.

"Get in here and pack up this grub," he snarled. "We're going to keep moving. Maybe the man come back and make trouble. I take no chances. Hurry now."

Ethelbert hurried, despite his weariness. Under Garcia's directions he packed the provisions and some cooking utensils in a gunnysack, filled the canteen at the feeble little spring, and staggered forth in the direction indicated by the Mexican.

"You make a good burro, I think," Garcia sneered, as he poked the burden-bearer with the rifle. "I make you worth something. No work, no eat. Very good."

The white flame of anger in Ethelbert's soul now began to menace Fear. Fear held its ground, however.

"The Mexican has a rifle and is looking for an excuse to commit murder," Fear whispered.

With the heavy, awkward load, and the merciless sun beating down on his bare head, Ethelbert marveled that he had the strength to stagger forward. But a man discovers undreamed of reservoirs of strength when death is dogging his footsteps, and Fear's cold fingers are playing a tattoo on his spine. By mid-afternoon he had lost all sense of individuality; with difficulty he recalled his own name. Was he a human being, or was he a vast ache driven forward by mindless brutality?

When he dared to pause to shift his burden, the Mexican prodded him with the rifle.

At sunset the white man staggered into the camp his swarthy taskmaster had selected, and fell prone. The Mexican squatted on his haunches, rolled a cigaret and waited for his slave to revive.

"Not much good," he commented, lifting his shoe-brush mustache in a sardonic grin. "Very soft. Too much petting."

He arose and kicked Ethelbert in the ribs.

"Get up," he yelled. "What do you think you can do, hey—lie down and do nothing? Get some grub."

For Ethelbert the preparing of that meal was fine torture. The Mexican did not offer to lift a hand. His slave must do it all. He even demanded that the white man bring the food to him.

Ethelbert was famished, but he waited until the Mexican gave him permission to clean up the scraps.

"Sleep now," said Garcia, a little later. "We get an early start for Mud Holes."

He alluded to the mud volcanoes that bubbled and rumbled on a lower reach of the desert range a day's journey to the east. His plan was to make a forced march and join Higg in Skeleton Cañon. By resuming the march at midnight, they could reach the Mud Holes at dawn, rest until noon, and be at the last waterhole by sundown. A short rest there and the final walk to Skeleton Cañon.

Garcia brooded over his status in the outlaw gang. He had not taken an active part in any of their raids, having merely cooked for them a few weeks in a mountain retreat near the Mexican border. Then, close-pressed, the gang had scattered. The Mexican, not having been officially identified with the outlaws, had felt that he might safely seek some town to the north, and there, as he had told Higg, "take a good rest."

But he had no pleasant memories of the outlaw chief. Higg had always called him "the greaser," always barred him from the gang's councils. He had always tamely submitted because of his fear of Higg, but this time he would play a new rôle. He would bring Higg a white man to fill the office of camp-slavey, and demand equal membership in the gang. Who was Higg to expect him to work like a squaw? No, this white man, who now slept so soundly, would become the slave of the gang, and he, Manuel Garcia, would council with Higg and prove to him that Mexican wisdom was equal to white wisdom.

Also, the enslaving of the white man would help to settle the score with the two-gun girl. It was plain that she loved this easily intimidated gringo. Had she not rested in his arms on the road that led to Eleven Palms? He, Manuel Garcia, would grind the soul out of the lover of the two-gun girl.

The murder lust rising within him he turned malevolent eyes on the sleeping white man, and cocked the rifle. No one had seen him with the gringo; why not kill him now? Later he could send a mocking message to the girl—a message that would

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assure her that the coyotes had feasted well on that which she loved.

No, that would be folly; she would know who sent the message and immediately many men would begin searching the desert for Manuel Garcia. He eased the hammer down to the safety. Better to enslave the white man; a dead man can not suffer. One can not torture the soul of a dead man, for, when death comes, the soul flees. Whither? The Mexican piously crossed himself.

This assumption of piety, he believed, fortified him against the machinations of any wandering souls, and he lay down to sleep. At midnight he arose and kicked the apparently lifeless Ethelbert in the ribs. This failed to awaken the sleeper, and he kicked him in the jaw. Ethelbert moaned and sat up.

"We move now," growled the Mexican.

Ethelbert touched his bleeding jaw.

"You kicked me when I was asleep," he said faintly.

"Yes, gringo, I kicked you," Garcia mocked. "It is better to be kicked than killed, is it not? Move!"

The white flame of anger in Ethelbert's soul licked out at the feet of Fear. Fear drew back.

Ethelbert strode from the camp, marveling at his recuperative powers. One, he thought, seemed to gain strength by effort. Then suddenly he sharply asked himself—

"How long are you going to stand this?"

At this question the white flame leaped high, and Fear cringed toward oblivion.

They reached the mud volcanoes at dawn. Ethelbert cooked breakfast while the Mexican rested and smoked. As he worked, Ethelbert reviewed his past actions. Why had he always been afraid of men—afraid of clash and combat? Why had he run from the crowd in Beamer? Why had he permitted the Mexican to dominate him? Why had he not fought the Mexican to the death? Why had he trusted the Mexican in the first place?

He rubbed his eyes. He had been blind, deeming blindness a virtue. Certain soft fools had taught him that it was wrong to fight, wrong to tempt death. Those blind fools did not know. Were they put to the test of suffering as he had been they would know that to give way to fear only increased suffering. He who submits will be burdened the heavier.

"How long," he savagely questioned himself, "are you going to stand this?"

YET he could not quite spur himself up to the point of action. Perhaps the Mexican would grow weary of this aimless wandering, and release him. He would not rouse the murder lust that at times gleamed in Garcia's dark eyes. It would be folly to attempt to resist an armed man. Still, something within him faintly urged:

"Take a chance, take a chance. Watch him, and the moment he is off his guard, rush him. Take a chance."

But the inner voice was very faint, and its feeble murmuring was lost in the sudden yell of Fear—

"He would shoot you down as he would a dog!"

This conflict was most disturbing. He felt a desire to hush the voice within him. When he had eaten the scraps left him by the Mexican, he lay down to seek forgetfulness in sleep.

Garcia, moving restlessly around the camp, aroused a sidewinder, killed it, and for a moment studied the dead snake. Then a pleasant thought came to him. He picked up the dead rattler and placed it on Ethelbert's chest.

Then he stepped back, and emitted a series of shrill yelps.

Ethelbert awoke, felt the weight on his chest, and raised his head until he glimpsed the mottled shape.

"Don't move," Garcia cautioned. "The snake will bite you if you move." He squatted down on his haunches to enjoy the amusing spectacle.

In one convulsive leap Fear gained all its lost ground, and the white flame of anger sank to a sputtering spark. Ethelbert felt his blood congeal in his veins. With infinite slowness he turned his head and regarded the smiling Mexican with eyes in which agony burned like living coals. His throat muscles moved spasmodically, and he whispered faintly—

"Help me!"

The Mexican shook his head.

"Lie still," he laughed, "and maybe he will go 'way. He is just getting warm on you. Don't bother him and he will go 'way."

The moments expanded into centuries, the centuries became bloated ages, the ages swelled into an eternity.

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The Mexican lifted his huge mustache in a hideous smirk. This form of entertainment was a tidbit to his soul which had a rare discrimination in such matters. Ethelbert caught that hideous smirk. The Mexican was responsible for this horror. Then he heard the brown man chuckle.

That chuckle fanned the dying spark of anger into flame and the flame rose to terrible heights. Fear faded into the shadows, and was no more.

With infinite caution the white man extended his arm, and began groping for a stick. Finding one, he slowly drew back his arm, and with a movement too quick for the eye to follow flicked the horrid burden from his chest, and sprang to his feet. He was about to trample the snake, when he saw that it was dead. Slowly he turned and regarded the Mexican with eyes in which hatred flamed. Then he glanced at the rifle in Garcia's hand, and turned away.

"Made you pretty sick," laughed the Mexican. "Pretty sick, I should say."

Ethelbert again turned and regarded his tormenter, but now his eyes were dull and expressionless.

"Thank you," he said quietly; and turned the dead snake over with the toe of his shoe.

"Why you thank me?" asked Garcia, greatly puzzled.

"I do not fear snakes now."

This was beyond the Mexican's comprehension. Something was wrong. He had tortured the white man, and had been thanked for it. Some trick here.

He pondered deeply, wrinkling his black brows and scratching his stubbled chin.

Ethelbert walked slowly down to the nearest volcano, and stood staring down at the bubbling, steaming liquid mud.

"He try a little trick," muttered the Mexican. "He think he can fool me by good talk." He grinned wickedly. "Maybe he will thank me for this."

Deliberately he knelt and fired several shots close to the motionless figure near the edge of the crater.

Ethelbert cringed a little as the bullets droned over his head, but did not move from his position. Fear was dead.

Garcia arose. Whizzing lead seemed to have lost the power to make the white man dodge. What further torture could he inflict on the gringo that would not destroy his usefulness as a slave? What, next to his life, did the white man hold most dear? Hah, the girl! But how could he explain the loss of his horse and his gun?

Ah, he would say that the girl had surrendered that she might secure his gun. He would admit that she had tricked him, but had paid for her trickery with all that a white woman holds dear. That would wrench a cry of agony from the gringo's soul.

Then a black thought rose suddenly to mock him. Would Higg accept a white slave from the hands of a Mexican? If this gringo told Higg of the affair at Eleven Palms, would the old outlaw approve? No, white would call to white. There, also, was Joe, the quick-tempered. Would that deadly gun-fighter, who had often shown marked consideration for women and children, smile at the story of the girl's lover?

No, he would not take the gringo to Skeleton Cañon. What a fool he had been not to have thought of the white man's pride of race. He would torture the soul of his captive, then kill him, and throw the body into one of the volcanoes.

Ethelbert listened to the story quietly enough, but within him the white flame of anger burst into full bloom. He must kill this man. But he must be sure; he must make no mistake. The Mexican had a rifle. He stared down at the bubbling mud, discarding plan after plan.

"So," Garcia softly concluded, "she play a little trick and get my horse and gun, but she pay for them—very good." He sucked in his breath noisily. "Ah, yes, she pay a good price." He shrugged his shoulders, and affected a dreamy, reminiscent smile. "A white girl is worth many horses—many guns. She was like a little wild-cat, but her strength was nothing to my strength. So, gringo, I think my horse and gun well lost. What you think?"

The Mexican studied the profile of the white man. The gringo believed the story—the haggard, drawn face testified to that. He was suffering fine soul-torture. Garcia rested the barrel of his rifle against the hollow of his arm, and rolled and lighted a cigaret. Then, with a sinister smile, he blew smoke in his victim's face.

"I THINK I shall return to camp," Ethelbert said, in a low voice.

The Mexican was silent; he had decided to fire the fatal shot as the white man walked toward the camp.

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Ethelbert turned as if to edge past the Mexican, but the moment he was even with him, he whirled and seized his arms.

To hold his balance, Garcia was forced to relinquish his rifle. They closed, and toppled to the ground. Writhing, twisting and clawing, they rolled away from the steaming crater.

Whimpering, the Mexican fought like some frenzied animal. But no sound escaped the lips of the white man; he fought with the terrible intentness of his race. The Mexican sensed that terrible intentness, and gave way before it.

"You should have known," Fear whispered, "that there is something in the white man that you do not possess—something that you can not conquer. Fool, he will surely kill you!"

They struggled to their knees, and for a moment the Mexican glimpsed the face of the white man and read therein deadly and unconquerable resolution. Frantically he attempted to wrench free of those implacable white hands, working steadily toward his throat.

They somehow gained their feet, only to crash to the ground, and, in a death-grapple, roll toward the crater. Again they struggled to their knees, and at last to their feet. The white man came up under the Mexican, and lifted him clear of the ground, and then, with one desperate heave, hurled the half-breed from him.

Garcia pitched backward, struck the rim of the crater, and balanced there. As he felt the hot breath of the volcano, his body set rigidly into the position in which it had fallen, arms crooked, fingers hooked. His head was a leaden thing that sagged to meet the steaming hell.

"Mother of God," he screamed in Spanish. "Save me!"

The Mexican felt the rim of the crater giving way beneath his back. He made a desperate effort to hold his balance, but that only hastened the end. Ethelbert leaped forward to seize the feet of the wretch and drag him back to solid ground. But the rim suddenly gave way, and with a screech, the doomed man sank into the bubbling mud.

Ethelbert, swaying on the very brink of the inferno, saw the liquid mud draw the Mexican down and close over him. Then he staggered back to safety.

Slowly he raised his haggard face, appealing his case to the Supreme Judge.

"I tried to save him," he solemnly averred. "My hands are clean."

Then he picked up the rifle and returned to the camp. He must get away from this inferno immediately. He would follow the course that the Mexican had set—due east along the desert hills. The desert range seemed to curve toward the timbered mountains. He could see trees fringing the high and serrated ridges. Those fringes of trees held for him a promise of running streams and human habitation.

Several hours of steady plodding brought him in sight of the mesquite that rimmed the last waterhole. The timbered mountains were much nearer now. That green island in the gray desert meant water. He quickened his pace, and soon entered the mesquite surrounding the waterhole.

Happily he dropped his pack and canteen, and plunged through a great mass of water-weed. But no glimmering pool smiled up at him. The waterhole was dry.

He returned to his canteen and gave it a calculating shake. Then he stared for several moments at the distant mountains. Surely there was water there. It was only a short walk across the desert plain that stretched between this oasis and those high, dark ridges with their tree-fringed crests. He could reach them before dawn.

He decided to rest for a few hours, eat sparingly, and then, in the cool of the night, go on to the mountains. Now that fear was dead, his mind functioned easily, unclogged by despair or dark imaginings.

He now realized the futility of bemoaning the dark past. Billie was alive; the Mexican had admitted that she had taken his horse and gun. As he turned Garcia's story over and over in his mind, he began to see its weak points. Surely she was not a girl to tamely surrender. If she had tricked the Mexican, she had certainly made her greatest effort before he completely overpowered her. Yes, it was reasonable to believe that she had escaped unscathed.

But, regardless of what misfortune had befallen her, he would find her and tell her that he loved her. He shuddered at the thought of the Mexican's dirty claws profaning her white beauty, but his love, boldly scorning the whimpers of outraged Puritanism, comforted him, saying—

"I am of the soul, and the soul is beyond the reach of evil hands."

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"It will come out all right, somehow," he cried aloud. "I must go on."

How the old desert must have smiled at this human mite chanting her litany! Since the beginning she has known that good invariably prevails. Though the fierce winds furrow her face, though the merciless sun blasts and withers her, she holds within her bosom's core the imperishable seeds of life—waiting, waiting, patient and long enduring, for the rejuvenating rains. Ah, then, the gorgeous triumph of good. Comes the fragrant verbena and the little golden poppies to adorn her. She who was once a hopeless, withered crone is now the laughing, blooming bride of the rains. Always, somehow, does good prevail.

XII

BILLIE gave the Mexican credit for speed and endurance, but inferred from Ethelbert's past performances that he would act as a drag. Save for a slight increase in courage, she considered him the same helpless, irresolute being that had accompanied her to Beamer. Thus she underestimated the progress of the two men, and approached that last waterhole at noon of the day following Ethelbert's night march to the mountains.

She left her horses and burros in a little cañon, and, with all the cunning and wariness of an Apache, approached the mesquite that surrounded the waterhole. Halting in the shelter of a wash, she studied the green tangle for several minutes. Then, with automatics at the ready, she crept up to the edge of the thicket.

The mesquite trees of this particular tangle writhed along the ground, sending up green shoots armed with implacable thorns. With difficulty the girl wormed her way through until she could see the bushes and weeds around the waterhole. Within that green circle nothing moved save a lizard and a foolish cottontail.

She crept forth from the tangle and swiftly circled the green rim. She frowned as she noted that the waterhole was dry. Striking a man's tracks, she followed them through an opening in the mesquite and for several rods toward the mountains. Then she ran back to decipher the record left by the mysterious traveler.

Trail lore to her was what fancy-work is to the hammock girl. Since she was a child it had been her father's favorite amusement to read with her the little stories of animal life written by pad and claw in the desert sand. He had taught her to read at a glance the stories of the wild. It was child's play for her to identify the road-runner's tracks, and note where he had breakfasted on a lizard. Easily could she unravel the nocturnal plots of coyote and wild-cat. The sidewinder might not hide from her the fact that he had dined on a fat rat.

Now she brought all her trail knowledge, all her powers of deduction to bear on the momentous question of the identity of the man who had recently visited the dry waterhole. Who was he? Was he carrying a pack? Was he armed?

First she closely examined the ashes of the cooking-fire, sifting them through her fingers. No, the man had not cooked breakfast. Had he cooked breakfast there would still be a little warmth in the ashes.

Then she studied the arrangement of the stones around the cooking-fire, and smiled. No experienced camper had set them in that careless fashion. She felt the stones; they, too, were cold. She next turned her attention to some pieces of wood near the fireplace, and tried to poke one of them through an interstice between the stones. But the stick was far too big. Why then had the man selected it? Because he was a tenderfoot, and lacked the measuring eye.

It was now necessary to identify the tracks of the traveler. She found that the tracks near the fireplace were clear and evenly indented, but that the tracks leading from the mesquite were unevenly indented. The man was carrying a burden that made him dig his toes in the sand.

She was now in the possession of the following facts: an inexperienced camper had entered the circle of mesquite bearing a burden. That burden was composed of provisions and cooking utensils, for he had clumsily arranged some stones on which to set a pot and pan. He had left the waterhole during the night.

She ran out to ascertain the direction from which the man had entered the mesquite, and followed the trail until satisfied that it led back to the mud holes. The score of deduction was now in favor of Ethelbert. She was fairly sure that the Mexican

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had not entered that circle of mesquite. He was an experienced camper, and would build a cooking-fire after the Indian style. Still, it might not be Ethelbert. There was no law barring other tenderfeet from the desert.

She returned to the waterhole and once more closely examined the tracks. Presently with a little exclamation of surprize, she discovered the imprint of a rifle-butt. He was armed. Then she found a great smooth place in the sand on the edge of the mesquite. There, she deduced, he had rested, lying flat on his back. She searched for the mark of the gun-butt close to the imprint of the man's form. Failing to find it, she zigzagged back until she came to a mark in the sand which she identified as the imprint of a burden. Near it was the mark of the gun-butt, now a narrow trough, showing that he had rested the gun against the burden. Therefore, he was without fear of surprize.

She returned to the imprint of the wanderer's form, and carefully stretched out beside it. Then she rose and studied the two imprints. Yes, Ethelbert was about that tall; there was just about that difference in their heights.

Still, she was not sure. She had found nothing with which to positively identify the man. If it was Ethelbert, how had he escaped from the Mexican? Where had he secured provisions and a rifle? Possibly at the homesteader's shack. In that event he had overpowered or killed the Mexican. Hardly that, though; the poor boy was in such deadly fear of the swarthy brute.

She searched every foot of ground within that circle of mesquite, hoping to find some article that would beyond a doubt identify the man whose habits were like Ethelbert's, whose tracks were like Ethelbert's, but who might be some other tenderfoot adrift in the wastes. At last she straightened up and shook her head. She was wasting time. The most feasible alternative was to trail the man.

She ran back to her pony and sprang into the saddle. As she picked up the trail of the wanderer, she read in its erratic course the indecision of the tenderfoot. Here he had circled a group of cholla when an experienced desert-rat would have slipped through, instinctively avoiding the menacing thorns.

LATE in the afternoon she came to the great wash that fanned out from the mouth of what she recognized as Skeleton Cañon. There she discovered the tracks of four horses, three abreast and one following. The three abreast displayed guidance; the one following, the zigzag course of a riderless horse. Three riders and a pack-horse, she deduced. The tenderfoot was following the trail of the horsemen. A little farther on, she found the tracks of the three riders where they had dismounted to smoke and to stretch their legs. They had ridden far and hard. The tenderfoot, apparently, had considered the footprints of the men of no importance for he had not paused to examine them. His lack of trail-caution certainly betrayed his tenderfoot characteristics.

She turned back and crossed the mouth of the cañon from rim to rim. She knew that a waterfall, flanked by frowning cliffs, barred their way at the head of the cañon. No, they had not doubled back; they were still in the cañon, and the tenderfoot had joined them. Who were they, and on what mission bent? Surely they were not prospecters. Prospecters preferred burros to horses. They were not cowboys, for there were no cattle ranging on this side of the mountains. They were not Government men, for Government men always took the field with the impedimenta of a small army.

Her desert-caution forbade her riding noisily up the cañon before she gained more definite information concerning the mysterious riders.

She decided to enter the adjoining cañon, and, under cover of darkness, spy on the riders' camp. She could sight their campfire from the crest of the intervening ridge, and then creep down and ascertain whether or not that tenderfoot answered to the name of Ethelbert Binns, as well as determine what manner of men the three riders were.

She entered the adjoining cañon, and shortly after sundown reached a big spring-fed pool surrounded by alder trees. She picketed the horses and unpacked the burros.

The cañon was now steeped in darkness. A great owl winnowed over her head, and on noiseless wings drifted through the trees. She heard a coyote bark far down the cañon. Something crashed through the brush.

"Never mind, ponies," murmured the

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girl, as the horses tossed their heads and whistled, "that was only a deer."

She dropped a couple of extra clips for her automatics into a small ammunition-bag, and began cautiously ascending the cañon side, striving to impress on her memory the principal obstacles she encountered. She might be compelled to return that way.

She gained the crest of the ridge without mishap, and followed it up until she came to the cliff that flanked the waterfall. But the dark depths of Skeleton Cañon gave up no telltale gleam of camp-fire. Once she thought she heard voices, but decided that she had been deceived by the sough of the wind through the pines on the upper ridges.

Why had the riders not built a camp-fire? Still, it was possible that they were asleep, and that their fire had died down. Also, they might have left the cañon. She descended a few steps and listened intently. Again she thought she heard the sound of voices. She crept down a few yards farther, and then nearly lost her footing as some rotten quartz gave way beneath her.

This would never do, she thought, as she struggled to her feet. She glanced up at the sky. Clouds had spread out from the peaks and obscured the stars. She decided to return to her camp, and from there proceed on foot to the mouth of Skeleton Cañon. There, free from all danger of gravel slides and of crumbling rock, she would make her slow and cautious way up to the waterfall. If the riders were asleep, she would cover them with her automatics before she hailed them. She was fairly sure that, if they had left the cañon, they had done so after dark. It was reasonable to suppose that, had they left the cañon before dark, they would have discovered her trail and investigated it. But why had they not built a camp-fire? That in itself looked suspicious.

She crept back to the crest of the ridge and began the descent to her camp. She heard her pony whinny, and stopped short. The little fool horse was welcoming her back to camp. She wished she could break him of that silly habit.

The whinny of the pony made her forget her usual trail-caution. She had ascended at a slant along the face of the cañonside. Now, with that welcoming whinny issuing from a point directly below her, she began an abrupt descent. Again some rotten quartz gave way beneath her, and she frantically clutched the limb of a dwarf cedar.

This was dangerous business. That fool pony had inveigled her into taking unnecessary risks. She decided to return to the crest of the ridge, and endeavor to descend over her old trail. This she did, fortunately recognizing a blowout of white rock she had noticed on first gaining the crest of the ridge. Cautiously she felt her way down the side of the cañon.

The general direction was correct, but she failed to avoid a small stone slide a short distance below her camp. There was no dwarf cedar to clutch now, and she tobogganed down. When she struck the floor of the cañon, she bounded to her feet, and ran backward to escape any boulders that might come crashing down.

Then two tall forms sprang from the shelter of the alders, and closed in on her.

XIII

HIGG wiped the frying-pan clean with a flapjack, folded the huge pancake to fit his mouth, and swallowed it, seemingly without mastication.

"I'll give that greaser till night to git in," he grumbled. "He's probably slipped up on me, what with his gamblin' and drinkin'. Said he wanted to put in a soft spell—wanted to rest up in Beamer with his friends. But, if he tries any Mex tricks on me, he'll git a rest—a mighty long one."

"You ought to 'a' got the Mowry boys, and left the Mex out of it," Joe reminded his chief. "The Mex is no good 'cept fer a cook or hoss-holder."

"It's a poor time to be tellin' me that," Higg exploded wrathfully. "You know as well as I do that the Mowrys are hard-run, and that we stood no chance of gittin' them. The Mex was the only one I could reach. I got to git along with what I can grab. If the greaser don't show up, we'll chance it anyway. That'll mean me in the bank, and you and Charlie watchin' the street. I'll take——"

Joe suddenly leaped to his feet.

"Some one's comin'," he whispered.

Instantly Higg and Charlie sprang up and seized their rifles, the former signaling to Joe to ascertain the identity of the intruder.

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Joe disappeared in the alders, rifle at the ready. Higg and Charlie drew back to the shelter of a huge boulder.

Warily Joe made his way through the trees and undergrowth. Suddenly he halted and peered through a clump of catclaw.

Ethelbert displayed weariness in every move. His steps were slow and dragging, and he bent forward under the seemingly ever-increasing weight of his burden. Now and then he looked up to measure the distance to the trees.

Joe waited until the bent figure was even with him, and then stepped from his hiding place, with a casual—

"Howdy."

Ethelbert halted abruptly, dropped his pack and stared at the grinning outlaw. He felt no twinge of fear, yet his tongue refused to operate.

Joe looked him up and down, and labeled him "harmless."

Ethelbert saw a tall, young man, with snapping black eyes, a straight nose and rather full lips. The dark-eyed youth displayed considerable "dressiness." The front of his shirt was gorgeous with needlework, and around the high crown of his hat was a beaded band of many colors.

There was an air of friendliness about the youth that warmed Ethelbert's lonely heart.

"I hardly expected to meet any one this way," he confessed, "but I'm certainly glad to see a human being."

"Where you headed fer?" Joe asked, his sharp eyes noting the light suit, dirty and torn, the scuffed shoes, and the ridiculous equipment.

"Well, I don't know," Ethelbert grinned. "Circumstances threw me alone in this country. I saw these mountains, and hoped to find some one who would let me have a horse and direct me to the Beamer road."

The young outlaw waved his hand toward the alders.

"Better come up to our camp," he invited.

Ethelbert shouldered his pack, and courteously waited for his host to lead the way.

"Go ahead," Joe said, grinning at the thought of a town tenderfoot adrift in the desert with an old gunnysack full of plunder.

As they entered the camp, Higg and Charlie came from the shelter of the boulder.

"A friend of mine," announced Joe, who had a vein of humor. "He peddles left-handed jew's-harps. Got a sack full of them."

Higg, ignoring Joe's quip, strode up to Ethelbert.

"What do you want here?" he snarled, cold menace in his shark eyes.

Ethelbert glanced appealingly at Joe, who immediately dropped a friendly hand on his shoulder.

"Aw, he's all right," the young outlaw assured his chief. "He's jes' a town boy that started to somebody's camp, got lost, and wandered over here. He's lookin' fer a lift back to Beamer."

Secretly, Joe admitted a liking for the rather pathetic stranger. The outlaw could not have explained the attraction, but there was something in the face of the tenderfoot that touched his heart.

"Well," growled Higg finally, "he's your pickin'."

Joe merely grinned. Higg always looked on the dark side, he thought. He turned and surveyed Ethelbert's varicolored whiskers.

"All colors," he laughed. "A human pinto."

Ethelbert, somewhat embarrassed, spread his hand over his stubbled jaw.

"I suppose I do look pretty rough," he agreed, half-apologetically.

Joe slapped him on the back.

"Don't mind me, *amigo*. Come on now, and throw some grub into you."

HIGG frowned as Joe led the tenderfoot over to their cooking-fire.

"That feller Joe will git us in a corner yet," he grumbled to Charlie. "He's always takin' a sudden fancy to somebody. That tenderfoot looks green enough, but you never can tell. He may be a spotter. That harmless look may be all put on."

"No use to tell Joe that," Charlie grunted. disgustedly. "Look, he's fryin' some meat fer him."

Higg rolled a cigaret and licked the paper meditatively.

"Well, anyway," he said between puffs, "if Joe sticks to him, maybe we can use him. If the greaser don't get here, I'll give this town pup a chance to show his teeth."

"What you mean—give him a chance?"

"I mean that he can help us on the Three

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Trail job. He's afoot, and we'll lighten the pack-hoss fer him to ride. Then, when we hit Three Trails, I'll put it up to him that his only chance fer this life is to stick with us. I'll show him that, if he quits us, he can look fer nothin' but rope or lead from the Three Trails people. Even if the Mex does come in, I can use this tenderfoot. A half-man is better than none.

"Still, I don't like Joe pettin' him. Joe's jes' fool enough to throw him loose and help him back to Beamer. Recollect how Joe helped that settler that was out o' water? Mighty nigh got the irons on our wrists fer that fool trick. His heart is always gittin' away with his head. 'Bout all we can do is to let it rest till we git to Three Trails."

"I guess so," grumbled the morose Charlie.

"Throw your teeth into that," Joe invited, as he passed Ethelbert a panful of juicy meat. "That's good old mountain-sheep."

"Thank you," Ethelbert mumbled, his mouth watering for a taste of fresh meat.

Joe seated himself Turk-fashion and rolled a cigaret.

"You ain't been in this country long, have you?"

"No," Ethelbert replied thickly, his mouth full of meat.

"I thought so," Joe nodded. "Anyway, make yourself at home. Maybe we can give you a lift."

"You're very kind to me," said the grateful wanderer.

"Uh-huh," muttered Joe vaguely.

When Ethelbert had finished eating, he arose and looked down thoughtfully at his new-found friend. Then slowly he drew forth the crumpled remains of the currency Billie had given him.

"I want to pay you for this meal," he said earnestly, offering the bills to the astonished Joe. "You might keep this money, and return, at your convenience, what is left after taking out the cost of my meals and horse hire."

Joe laughed and waved the bills aside.

"Keep your *dinero*, partner; I ain't runnin' no hotel. What's a little grub? Huh! Nothin'."

Ethelbert returned the bills to his pocket.

"I certainly appreciate your kindness," he said, with an ingenuous smile.

"Aw, that's all right." Joe feigned gruffness to hide an odd embarrassment. "I wouldn't let no white man go hungry."

Ethelbert tried to think of a fitting reply, but the heavy meal and the loss of sleep made a numbing assault on his faculties.

"I guess I'll have to get a little sleep," he murmured. "Pretty tired."

Joe watched him as he stretched out in the shade of an alder.

"As harmless as a child," the outlaw mused. "Jes' a feller who wants to do right. I swear he's got me to likin' him."

At mid-afternoon Ethelbert awoke. He sat up to find Joe sprawled out near him.

"I was jes' thinkin'," the outlaw confessed, with a whimsical smile, "of when I was a kid. Days like this, me and the other boys jes' lived in the water. What say, you and me take a swim up yonder?" He indicated a glimmer of water through the trees.

"That would be fine," Ethelbert agreed.

Followed by the disapproving frowns of Higg and Charlie, they sought a deep-shaded pool a few rods above the camp.

They quickly undressed and plunged in. When they had splashed and gamboled to their hearts' content, they dressed and seated themselves on the grassy bank.

Joe drew a pack of greasy cards from his shirt pocket.

"What say to a little seven-up?"

"Seven-up? I can't say that I know that game. I can play casino, though."

Joe laughed.

"You sure must have been raised by hand. All right, casino it is."

And so the impetuous young outlaw and the guileless youth from a sleepy Midwestern town played the child's game of casino, finding in each other a strangely comforting companionship.

AS THEY played, Ethelbert ascertained from his opponent's rather disjointed remarks that the latter's name was Joe and that he held no exalted opinion of the two men in the camp. Confidence called for confidence, and Ethelbert responded with a sketch of his life, omitting, however, his desert experiences.

"Well, I can't say I was raised that way," Joe mournfully confessed, as he gathered in big casino. "I don't recollect bein' raised a-tall. Jes' kind of run wild. Had a little trouble when I was about eighteen—had to move. So I kept on movin', and here I be.

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One thing leads to another in this man's country."

"You say you had some trouble," Ethelbert questioned, more in sympathy than curiosity.

"Yes," Joe replied, with sharp emphasis. "I killed a man."

Ethelbert stared at the self-confessed killer blankly. Then he visioned his struggle with the Mexican at the Mud Holes. Perhaps this man had had equal provocation.

"Perhaps you did it in self-defense," he said hopefully.

"Oh, no," was Joe's startling reply. "We jes' got into a scrap and I beat him to it. He had a lot o' friends and I had to skip. After that they began layin' things on to me I hadn't done, and that made me mad. So I thought I might as well have the game with the name. I don't mind tellin' you now, that there's a lot of men who'd like to slip the irons on me."

"Irons?"

"Yes; irons. Handcuffs, you'd call 'em."

"Then you're——"

Joe grinned.

"Whatever the worst you're thinkin', I'm it."

"Isn't there some way," Ethelbert asked, after a long silence, "some way you could make them understand that you weren't entirely to blame for—for the things you have done?"

Joe shook his head, his young face hardening.

"No chance now, boy. Too much back of me. Only thing to do is to keep movin'. I belong to the tribe of the Never-stops. But don't worry about me. I'll see that you git headed back to where you belong. May have some trouble with my friends here, who sort o' figger, I guess, to take you into the family. I can tell by the looks of 'em that they're scared to throw you loose. They think you'll tell all you know to the first off'cer you see. I know better, though. You ain't the kind to squeal on a friend. How about it, Binnsy?"

Ethelbert sighed deeply. Here was a hard problem. This man had offered him friendship and he had accepted it. Could he inform against him?

At last he decided that his conscience was powerless to condemn a lapse of memory. He would forget that he had met this strangely fascinating youth.

"No," he admitted, with painful reluctance, "I couldn't betray a friend."

"Not if he was the wickedest cuss on earth?"

Joe's tones were gruff, but there was a warm light in his eyes.

"No," Ethelbert solemnly averred, "not if he was, as you say, 'the wickedest cuss on earth'."

Joe hastily gathered up the cards.

"Come on," he said briskly. "I'm goin' to tell the boss that you got to have a lift to the Beamer road."

Ethelbert followed his impetuous friend back to the camp. Joe immediately sought the lowering Higg.

"Here's the layout," he began, "and don't tell me I'm wrong." He jerked his head toward Ethelbert who had discreetly halted near the edge of the camp. "That boy needs a lift, and I'm goin' to give him one regardless of what you say. He won't say nothin' and it will save you trouble if you let me have my way. He's goin' to be treated right, and that's all there is to it."

Higg, while he companioned with the sluggish and low-minded Charlie, counted Joe the superior gunman, even to acknowledging a secret fear of the dark-eyed youth. He knew Joe's wild and terrible temper and had no desire to arouse it. But his weasel heart held no sympathy for Joe's foolish habit of rushing blindly to the assistance of the unfortunate. Many times had the gang been dragged into the shadow of the penitentiary by Joe's impetuous rush to the aid of some victim of desert thirst or starvation.

Higg's motto was, "Every man for himself." He counted Joe's kindness of heart a form of insanity. Yet he dared not do otherwise than humor him.

"All right, Joe," he grunted. "Wrap your tenderfoot in a blanket and carry him home. I give up long ago tryin' to work any sense in that soft head of your'n."

Joe turned and yelled at Ethelbert:

"Old Standin' Bear here agrees with me, Binnsy. You might rustle up some wood. We'll have grub pretty soon."

"You'll hang us all yet, Joe," Higg gloomed. "You trust a man on sight and you're goin' to git bit some day. If we'd take that tenderfoot with us, and break him in on the Three Trails job, I'd——"

"Hold on," Joe firmly interrupted. "I

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break in no green men. I'm sayin' here and now, if they'd take the reward off'n me and wipe the slate clean, I'd never snap another cap or touch another gun as long as I lived. Think I want this boy to live like I do? Movin'—always movin', not knowin' who's your friend, run across two States, dodgin' and duckin'. Never know who'll give you your lead—never a minute you're not expectin' some sneak to blow your heart out. Nope, this boy shows clean to me, and he stays that way."

"Sounds like you was cut out fer a preacher," ventured Charlie, with labored sarcasm. "Maybe we'd better open the meetin' now."

Joe regarded the would-be humorist with bright, dangerous eyes."

"Any meetin' I open," he said softly, "you won't be there. Keep that in mind, toadhead."

Charlie took a chew of tobacco and drew back in his shell.

"Well, then, let's rustle somethin' to eat," Higg barked. "Joe, you're set on givin' the tenderfoot a lift; all well and good. Your hoss will carry double. You can drop your friend on the north fork of the Beamer road east of here. Now let's have no more fuss about it. We'll move right after sundown. Looks like the Mex is a dead card now."

Ethelbert had brought up some wood and started a fire.

"Everything's all hunkadory, Binnsy," Joe reported, brimful of friendliness. "I made him see you as I see you. We leave here right after sundown. You ride with me to the north fork of the Beamer road. Now for the eats."

After supper the three outlaws closely inspected their arms and equipment. Joe, Ethelbert noted with a curious pang of regret, gave special attention to his six-shooter. It seemed hardly possible that such an attractive character was a killer and an outlaw.

In other smug and comfortable days, Ethelbert would have condemned Joe to everlasting punishment; but now, since the cold desert had cracked his mental shell, he was beginning to think. Perhaps, he thought, it was by mere accident of birth and evironment that he, Ethelbert Binns, was not an outlaw. He drew back, humbled at the appalling power of environment and circumstance. After all, no man could safely prate of his virtues. Any moment a combination of circumstances might arise that would make him a murderer, a thief or an outcast.

When the horses were saddled, Joe kicked dirt on the fire until the last spark was extinguished.

"I don't know," Higg debated, "but what we'd better ride on down to the mouth of the cañon and wait there a spell. That yeller dog might come draggin' in at the last minute."

"All correct," sang out Joe, leaping into his saddle. "Here Binnsy, git up back of me."

They rode slowly down to the mouth of the cañon, and there waited in the thickening gloom for the Mexican. Ethelbert had heard Higg's remark concerning "the yellow dog," but he was too occupied with retrospection, especially some sorrowful thoughts of Billie, to pay much attention to Higg's grumbling.

At last Higg growled—

"No use waitin' any longer."

He led the way across the mouth of the adjoining cañon.

XIV

MIDWAY across the wash the bandits halted abruptly.

"Did you hear that hoss nicker?" Higg asked Joe.

"Plain enough. There's somebody up there. There's no hosses runnin' loose on this side of the mountains. It's some rider—maybe the man we're lookin' fer."

"No chance of it bein' him," Higg said. "He'd come straight to our camp. I guess we'd better have a look. We'll ride up till we strike the brush and then git down and do a little Injun work. Charlie, you come with me. You stay with the hosses, Joe. We ain't much time, but I'd like to know who's pokin' 'round up there."

They rode up the barren wash until they came to the first barrier of brush and undergrowth. There, Higg and Charlie dismounted and removed their spurs, lest the jingle of steel betray them. Then, bending low, they slipped forward. Coming to the alder trees, they cat-stepped through until they discerned the vague shapes of horses and burros.

Those two horses meant two riders. They edged in closer, straining their eyes

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to discover the forms of sleeping men. They passed the horses and, crouching low, edged up to the packs. When they ascertained that the packs were undisturbed, they drew back swiftly to the shelter of the alders. Perhaps the owners of the horses had heard them coming, and were watching them from safe covert.

Then, from far up the cañonside, came the rattle of falling rock.

Something was descending the cañonside. They slipped to the edge of the alders. A little open space intervened between the trees and the foot of the sloping cañonside.

Suddenly there came the swishing sound of falling gravel, and then a figure tumbled down the stone slide, bounced to its feet and staggered across the opening into the alders. In unison the men seized the arms of the mysterious being who immediately gave them a good imitation of a trapped wild-cat.

A gun spat flame, even as the hands of the men, gripping the captive's wrists, shot skyward. Charlie was about to bring the barrel of his heavy six-shooter down on the head of the struggler, when Higg hissed—

"Git his gun."

Charlie holstered his gun, reached up and plucked the weapon from the hand of the captive, and dropped it in his capacious hip pocket. Then he gripped the slender wrist with his right hand, and twisted the arm down and back, at the same time groping with his left hand for a grip on the neck. His hand came in contact with a heavy braid of hair.

"My Gawd, it's a woman!" he yelled.

Higg, who could feel that the wrist that he held was straining to turn the hand downward, holstered his gun, and secured the other automatic. Then he twisted the arm down and back.

"Here, take this arm," he hoarsely whispered, "till I see if she's any more popguns."

Charlie gripped the girl's wrists while Higg, none too lightly, patted her over, only to find the extra clips for the automatics.

"Wait," he grunted. "Maybe she's a knife or somethin' in her boot."

He dropped down on one knee and began fumbling her foot.

Billie lunged back against Charlie, and kicked out with all her might. The toe of one of her sturdy boots caught Higg fairly in the mouth.

He emitted a muffled blat of anguish, struggled to his feet, and clapped his hand to his mouth.

"Cripes!" he blubbered. "She kicked the whole face off'em me! Why didn't you hold the little hellion?"

Charlie gave vent to a rumble indicating amusement.

"Nothin' to laugh at," snarled Higg, fingering a loose front tooth.

Then, in a sudden rage he clutched the girl's soft throat.

"Here, what's up?" Joe's hand descended on Higg's shoulder. "I heard a shot and come a-runnin'."

Higg relinquished his grip on the girl's throat.

"A girl," he grated, "carrying two automatics."

"Automatics?" echoed Joe. "Let's feel 'em."

Higg gave him the little gun.

"Where's the other?"

"In my hip pocket," Charlie told him.

Joe secured the other automatic and balanced it in his hand, comparing its weight with that of its mate. "Little twin sisters," he murmured.

Then, thrilled with a sudden curiosity to see the girl's face, he dropped the automatics in his hip pockets, and struck a match.

Meanwhile, Ethelbert was holding the horses on the edge of the alders. He was aware that he could now easily escape, leaving the three outlaws afoot. But there was Joe—the man who had befriended him. Was the young outlaw entitled to fair treatment? His mind began playing seesaw. First, thoughts of self, then thoughts of Joe. He got as far as mounting Joe's horse, but some mysterious qualm forbade him tricking the youth who had palled with him. Finally he dismounted.

What Joe saw in the flare of the match, made him gasp. Billie stared straight into his eyes, and read therein delighted surprize and intense interest. The hostile light faded from her eyes and she smiled wanly as the match sputtered out.

"This man is hurting my wrist," she moaned.

Joe could not withstand the appealing note in her voice.

"Let her go, Charlie," he gruffly ordered.

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"I'm not kickin' on my job," Charlie sniggered.

"I said, 'let her go,' " Joe rasped. "Hear me?"

Charlie, recognizing the sign of rising temper, reluctantly released the girl. Immediately she stepped to Joe's side, and began sobbing.

"Here, here," comforted the youth, patting her shoulder, "don't do that. We won't hurt you. Are you alone?"

"Yes, yes; I'm alone," she wailed, though inwardly she was coldly calm. "Oh, I'm so frightened! I'm sure you are hold-up men."

"Well," gulped Joe, incautiously, "maybe we be, but you don't need to be afraid."

They were outlaws, thought the girl, but in the face of this one she had read sympathy and admiration. To him she would appeal with every art known to femininity.

"I'm hungry, too," she whimpered childishly. "I thought I heard some one talking and I climbed up on the ridge—and these men caught me—and I've had no supper."

"Sure a heap of trouble you've had," commiserated Joe. Then to Higg. "Guess we'd better git some supper fer her."

"More foolishness," raged Higg, who had a firm conviction that woman was synonymous with trouble. "Don't you see we're losin' time! Come on, and let's git out of here. We'll take one of her hosses."

Joe's reply was an indifferent—

"Uh-huh!"

What he wanted was to study the girl's face and talk to her. The looting of the Three Trails bank could wait.

He began kicking some leaves and brush together.

"We'll see that you git something to eat," he assured the girl as he struck a match.

As the flames leaped up, Higg and Charlie drew back in the shadows, but Joe, indifferent to possible danger, stood in the full glare of the fire and smiled at the girl.

"You'll find some provisions in my pack," she told the young outlaw.

"Better come with me and show me what you want," he suggested.

"Oh, all right," she agreed, with a little sigh of weariness.

WHEN they reached the packs, Joe stopped short, and stared at the Mexican's horse, which had entered the circle of firelight.

"Why—why," he stammered. "That's Manuel's hoss. You sure ain't travelin' with a Mex?" His straight black brows wrinkled into a heavy frown. "If you be, where is he?"

He swept the shadows with a savage glance, as if expecting to see Garcia emerge from the darkness.

"No," she explained in that same weary, childish voice, "the Mexican is not with me. He overtook me on the other side of the desert hills, and threatened to kill me if I refused to go with him. I pretended my saddle-cinch was loose, and he came back to tighten it. I struck him with a stirrup and took his gun and horse. I'm on my way to join my father on the north side of the mountains. He—he is a scientist—collects bugs and things."

"The dirty dog," snarled Joe, taking the Mexican's gun from the saddle-pocket and examining it closely.

"My father?" Reproachfully.

"No, ma'am"—fiercely—"that blamed greaser. If I ever see him, there'll be one Mex less."

He ejected the cartridges from the Mexican's gun and savagely hurled it into the brush.

"You're very free with my keepsakes," reproached the girl.

"That yellow sneak will never use that gun agin," he growled. "I'll see that——"

"But you've forgotten that I am very hungry."

The savage frown on Joe's face gave way to a boyish grin; and he fairly flew at the packs.

Calmly the girl loaded him with cooking utensils and provisions.

As they returned to the fire, he began chuckling.

"Pretty smart trick," he muttered. "Whacked that greaser with her stirrup. Pretty smart."

Joyously he proceeded to enlighten Higg and Charlie.

"Her paw's a sci-en-tist. She's on her way to meet him. The Mex overtakes her and gits gay with her. What does she do but knock him on the knob with her stirrup, and set him afoot. I'll bet that greaser will know enough after this to ride around a white girl. I can see——"

At this juncture Ethelbert entered the circle of firelight. Billie's back was to him, but she whirled as he shouted her name and sprang toward her.

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In a flash she saw the danger of recognizing the man she loved. Her plan was to play the tall young outlaw against his fellows. She could not do that if she acknowledged her love for Ethelbert. Even a show of friendliness would be dangerous.

"You're taking a lot for granted," she said coldly, "just because I danced with you once at Beamer."

Ethelbert gasped, and stared at her as though she had knifed him.

"But you——"

"Please do not annoy me," she snapped; and turned to Joe. "Will you tell him that I do not desire to be annoyed?"

Carefully Joe placed the cooking utensils and the provisions on the ground near the fire and strode over to Ethelbert.

"Binnsy," he said in strained tones, "I've been a friend to you, but I'll have to tell you now where to head in. This lady don't want to be a'noyed. Git it—a'noyed? If you open your head to her agin, me and you mix."

"But she——"

"Shut up," clicked Joe so viciously that Billie felt interference necessary.

"Please get me something to eat," she begged, plucking at Joe's sleeve, and maneuvering for a position from which she might safely signal Ethelbert.

Peering over Joe's shoulder, with her back to Higg and Charlie, she swiftly touched a finger to her lips, signaling silence.

Ethelbert's heart gave a leap of joy. Love summoned Faith and Faith whispered to him:

"She has a plan. Silence. Wait."

He drew back in quick obedience to her imperative signal.

Joe and Billie returned to the fire. She chatted with him, as he prepared the meal. Her apparent helplessness appealed to the young outlaw's egotism. In a fog of infatuation, he could not see that a girl who had crossed the desert alone was entirely capable of fending for herself under any condition. Even if she had tricked the Mexican, she was only a little girl.

"There it is," gloomed Higg to Charlie. "Another one of his fool tricks. He's plum' loco. This don't look good to me."

Charlie made no reply; he was debating darkly. Joe was a lightning gunman, yet this woman was worth almost any risk. Higg was too old—he didn't care. If Joe was out of the way. . . Smoldering desire leaped into sudden flame. He strode forth from the shadows, and, bending down, leered into Billie's face.

JOE, his eyes on sizzling bacon, was unaware of Charlie's advances until he heard the girl give a little exclamation of annoyance. Then he looked up and saw the evil smirk on the face of the manw hom he had always held in ill-concealed contempt.

Slowly he arose, and, before his menacing advance, Charlie retreated toward Higg. Joe followed him, hand hovering over gun-butt, face set, eyes glittering.

Higg sprang past the slowly retreating Charlie, and toward Joe, in the rôle of peacemaker. But in Joe's mind was only one thought. No man should interfere with his winning of the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Out flashed his gun. Higg stopped short, in a frozen crouch. Charlie half-raised his hands.

"Git it straight now, you two," Joe yelled. "You can go on or stay, but the first one that bothers the girl gits my lead."

"But, Joe," whined Higg, "we ought to be movin'."

"You heard what I said."

Higg noted that dangerous tremble in Joe's voice.

"Put up your gun," he wheedled. "No use to do anything foolish, Joe. We can't afford to fuss over nothin'."

"You heard what I said," repeated Joe doggedly.

He holstered his gun and backed around the fire, halting where he could keep a watchful eye on his two partners.

Billie was calmly munching bacon and crackers. She handed a big tin cup to Joe.

"Pour me some coffee," she ordered.

Meek as any restaurant flunky, he obeyed.

Higg and Charlie drew back to their horses.

"Nothin' to do," Higg grumbled hopelessly, "but wait till he comes out of it. The fool is fair gone—plum' stuck!"

Charlie made no comment. His sluggish mind was boiling thickly with murderous thoughts.

When Billie had finished eating, Joe drew her back from the fire.

"I want to talk with you," he said softly. "Never mind them other fellers; they don't count."

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The girl glanced across the circle of firelight at the drooping Ethelbert.

"Where did you pick him up?" she lightly queried.

Joe laughed.

"Aw, he drifted into our camp in Skeleton Cañon carrying a gunnysack full of plunder. I kind of took a likin' to him, and figgered to give him a lift to the Beamer road. But now that I've met you, I reckon he'll have to go alone?"

"How so?" she sharply queried.

"Why," and his voice took on a musical cadence, "I thought I might help you find your paw."

"But those other men—your friends?" she questioned, in a desperate attempt to distract his attention from herself, and at the same time not positively rebuff him.

Also, she wanted to sound him regarding her automatics which she knew he had retained in his possession.

"Nothin' counts with me now," came his eager low-toned reply, "but you."

His arm strayed around her waist. She shrank back a little.

"I wish you would not do that," she begged.

Joe withdrew his offending arm, marveling at his gentleness. She held fast to what she considered a safe subject.

"I do not understand why those men treated me so roughly," she complained, rubbing her wrists together.

"Guess they had to," laughed Joe. "You had your little twin sisters, and they might have bit 'em."

"Do you mean my guns?"

"Uh-huh."

As Samson of old, he was headed toward the scissors.

He drew the little automatics from his hip pockets, and grinningly inspected them.

Billie had all she could do to hold her attitude of calm indifference. Her fingers fairly tingled for the feel of those deadly little weapons. If she reached for them, she would arouse distrust, and the demon that intuition told her slumbered in the heart of this handsome desert-rover.

"I guess I'll keep them fer you," Joe decided. "You don't need any guns as long as I got mine."

"Just as you wish," she murmured.

He replaced the weapons in his hip pockets, and bent toward her.

"Oh, I'm so sleepy," she sighed. "I've had a hard day. I must have some rest."

She sought her packs, and began unrolling her blanket.

"Can't I help you?" he asked, loath to leave her.

"No, thank you," she replied wearily.

Then, turning toward the fire that he might see her friendly smile, she extended her hand, and sweetly bade him good night.

He clasped her hand, and then suddenly drew her to him. She made no resistance. Her arms hung limply at her side, but, as he pressed her close, her right hand groped toward his hip pocket. He suddenly thrust her from him.

"Aw," he cried desperately, good and evil battling within him, "I want you, yet I don't want you—this way! I want you to come to me because your heart says so."

He raised his arm over his eyes to shut out the beauty of her face. Then he whirled, and nearly collided with Ethelbert, who had sprung forward with some wild idea of tearing Billie from the outlaw's arms.

Joe gave him no time to remonstrate, but seized his arm and pulled him from the camp.

"Come on," the outlaw gritted between clenched teeth, "she wants to sleep."

XV

HIGG knew only too well the power of woman to break the strongest ties fashioned by man. The old outlaw knew that love of woman is never quiescent; that it ever demands action. Ultimately his two lieutenants would battle for the girl. There was only one trail open, an appeal to their loyalty. But in his secret heart he knew that the loyalty of man to man against the lure of woman was as a rope of sand.

As Joe, followed by Ethelbert, approached him, Higg began a half-soliloquy:

"I might as well go on alone now, fer all that any one here gives a cuss. Might have known I would be left in the lurch. Can't make some folks see what's ahead of them. Jes' can't make 'em see——"

His voice died away in a hopeless whine.

There was no response to the carefully-worded appeal.

Higg started a little fire, and slowly removed the camp equipment and provisions from the pack-horse.

"Well, boys," he remarked dolorously,

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"you leave me nothin' to do but take my share of this plunder and move on."

When he was ready to depart, he turned to Joe who refused to meet his reproachful gaze.

"Goin' to throw me down, Joe? Ain't I always been fair and square with you? Goin' to let me go on alone jes' because of a little——"

Joe's face twisted in sudden fury.

"Don't mention her," he stormed, "or I'll fergit who you be. Go on, and have it over with. Don't talk! Move, if you're goin' to!"

Sadly Higg wagged his head and turned to Charlie.

"How about you, Charlie?"

"Go ahead," was the gruff response. "You're doin' it yourself. This is a free country. I stay till I git good and ready to move."

Joe gave Charlie a look of deadly menace.

"There's nothin' holdin' you back," he reminded that worthy, with biting sarcasm. "You ain't so popular around here that you'd be missed."

Charlie calculated the odds against him, and decided to postpone action. Joe's gun-drawing ability shaded his by a good split second. He would await a more favorable opportunity. Of course, if Joe forced his hand, he would go into action, but he preferred treachery to fair fighting. Sullenly he drew back to the shelter of a tree.

Higg moved toward his horse. He might now laugh and tell them that he was just joking, but that would not change the situation. If anything, it might actually turn them against him. Any moment the wrong word might transform Joe into a raging, unreasonable being. Why should he risk his life in a vain attempt to bring these young fools to a realization of their folly?

To oppose them in any way would be fatal. To remain might precipitate a fight in which he would have nothing to win and everything to lose. Wisdom warned him to move on, leaving them to battle over the woman. But they had endured many privations together. There was a spark of sentiment in the heart of the old outlaw. It was not easy to leave these men who had ridden the long, long trail with him.

Slowly he mounted his horse, still cherishing a faint hope that they would follow, but they let him depart without a word or a sign of regret.

Joe kicked some wood on the fire, and began pacing to and fro, now and then flinging a deadly glance in Charlie's direction.

Ethelbert dropped down at the edge of the circle of firelight, striving to deduce from Billie's silencing signal the nature of the plan she had in mind. It was plain that she was depending on Joe to protect her from Charlie. But—and he recalled the outlaw's impetuous embrace that had so nearly made him forget Billie's warning signal—could she hold that fiery youth at arm's length? Playing with Joe was like toying with dynamite. A clash between Joe and Charlie meant the death of one of them, probably Charlie. He would then, he decided, regardless of Billie's plan, rush the survivor. If he reached him, unwounded, he was confident that he could tear the life from his body.

It was the new Ethelbert thinking now. No thought of self, no cringing back; simply a man praying for a fighting chance.

Suddenly Joe jerked his saddle-gun from its scabbard. snatched up a blanket, and, with a grumbled, "Guess I'll take a sleep," and a parting glare at Charlie, slipped into the brush.

Charlie brooded a few moments, then secured his rifle and blanket.

"Might as well sleep," he rumbled to Ethelbert; and disappeared in the dark tangle.

"They have not unsaddled their horses," was Ethelbert's mental comment. "They do not mean to sleep."

For several moments he scarcely breathed, expecting to hear the blast of rifle-fire. Were they stalking each other, or were they watching Billie's camp? Presently he saw Billie throw some wood on the fire, and he heaved a sigh of relief. Light was a blessed thing.

He glanced at the fire Higg had started, now a bed of dull coals, and decided not to replenish it. Perhaps he might creep near enough to her to attract her attention without being seen by the two outlaws.

Charlie, for all his bulk, squirmed through the brush as noiselessly as a snake. Primarily his purpose had been to locate Joe without being discovered by that deadly and quick-tempered youth. But he soon gave up that dangerous quest, and crouched

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down back of a boulder to watch the girl's camp. He was hoping that the lure of the woman would draw Joe into the circle of firelight. He could then shoot down his incautious partner, with no risk to his own precious hide.

"And when I git her," was his mental decision," she won't fool with me."

He dropped down into a comfortable position, and eased back the hammer of his rifle.

Joe lay in a dark covert a good stone's throw beyond Charlie, with an unobstructed view of the girl's camp. His mind was a battle-ground of good and evil thoughts.

He would protect her—no man should disturb her. No, he would immediately seize her and take her to some retreat farther into the mountains. If necessary, he would kill Charlie. Binnsy, the tenderfoot, didn't count. But of what comfort were the cold lips of a woman held against her will? This girl was not an Indian squaw to be beaten into loving a man. She could only be won by fair and gentle treatment. But why waste time? There she was, beautiful and luring—and helpless.

Perhaps she had a sweetheart: some man of the town, respectable and safe. Surely such a girl could not have failed to attract some man. Admitting that she was not heart-free, why waste time? Cold lips were better than none. But his love-hungry heart, yearning for the true and natural, struggled against the evil desire that pulled and tugged insistently. Thus the battle within him prevented any final decision.

SLEEP for Ethelbert was out of the question. Despite Billie's warning, he felt that he must talk with her. The suspense was becoming intolerable. Was there nothing he could do? He thought of the rifle he had carried across the desert, and shook his head. If, by chance, considering the fact that he had never fired a rifle, he disabled one of the outlaws, the other would have sufficient time to kill him. That would leave Billie at the mercy of the survivor.

The slow minutes dragged by. Ethelbert discarded plan after plan, invariably returning to Billie's signaled demand for silence and inaction.

At last he could bear the suspense no longer. Surely, if she cared for him, she would not expect him to always be silent and inactive. He must ascertain definitely her plan.

Cautiously he began creeping toward the side of the cañon opposite the points at which Joe and Charlie had disappeared. It was slow and dangerous work. Any moment he might be confronted by one or both of the outlaws. On all fours he made a complete half-circle of Billie's camp, halting at a point a few yards beyond her. Then he turned and squirmed slowly toward her. When within a few feet of her, he flattened himself back of a bush and flung a handful of dirt and pebbles at her.

She had drawn the fold of the blanket over her, and was lying with her back to the fire. One of the pebbles struck her hand. She made no instant response to the signal. Ethelbert was about to repeat the signal, when she raised up with a great pretense of sleepiness. Then she flung the blanket aside and rose to her feet.

She looked about her casually. Her sharp eyes glimpsed a man's leg. There was no boot in evidence. The outlaws wore boots; it must be Ethelbert. He evidently desired to communicate with her. Poor foolish, thoughtless boy, he was taking desperate chances, and that, too, doubtless, without any feasible plan. But she would have to answer his signal, or he might make some move that would arouse the bandits to immediate action.

She had heard one of the outlaws ride away. Where were the other two? Possibly they were watching her. She threw some wood on the fire, and strolled back to her blanket. Pretending dissatisfaction with her bed, she picked up the blanket and looked about her as though seeking a more desirable location. Then she deliberately entered the shrubbery beyond the bright radius of firelight, spread the blanket near Ethelbert, and dropped down.

"Where are the men?" she whispered.

"Joe and Charlie are in the brush somewhere—said they wanted to sleep. The old man rode away. What do you intend to do?"

"Prevail on Joe to return my guns. Go back to your camp. This is very foolish of you. If either one of them found you here, he would kill you."

"Is there nothing I can do?"

"Nothing," she replied, "except wait.

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Go, now, and trust me. Show no sign of any interest in me."

"Are you sure your plan is the best?"

"Trust me, dear," she whispered. "Go, now."

Then suddenly she stared fixedly at some object back of Ethelbert who, touched with a feeling of impending danger, sprang to his feet. He whirled to find Joe, crouching within a few feet of him, rifle at the ready.

"So you're the high card, Binnsy," the outlaw laughed wildly.

A flicker of light from the fire disclosed his face distorted with passion.

Ethelbert saw that Billie could no longer play her woman's game with the outlaw. There was only one chance left—an appeal to Joe's sense of fairness. Ethelbert was not an actor, but his desert experience, like a great battle, had aged him, and had awakened faculties that had lain dormant because of no desperate call of necessity.

"You're only brave because you're armed!"

Before the bitter scorn of Ethelbert's words, the outlaw flinched as though an insulting hand had slapped his face.

"You dare not fight me with your hands!"

The insulting challenge swept all caution, all reason from Joe's mind. A man had said that he was afraid to fight with his hands.

With a yell of fury, he flung his rifle into the brush back of him, and charged wildly. Grateful to his heart's core for a fighting chance, Ethelbert met him more than halfway.

Locked in a terrible embrace they crashed to the ground and rolled over and over toward the fire.

Billie had a wild thought of securing Joe's rifle, but dared not waste the precious moments searching for it. There was yet the other outlaw—the lowering, evil-faced man from whom she could expect no mercy.

She followed the struggling men, hovering over them, watching for an opportunity to pluck her automatics from Joe's hip pockets.

Joe's volcanic rage had enabled him to bear Ethelbert down. He was now astride his victim, and reaching for his throat. So intent was he on his deadly work that he did not feel Billie pluck the automatics from his pockets.

As she secured the precious weapons, she sprang back just in time to avoid the rush of Charlie, who, on seeing the men roll into the circle of firelight, has decided to take full advantage of a situation so favorable to his desires. He had seen the girl hovering over the struggling men, but, as her back had been to him, and her movements lightning quick, he had failed to see her secure the guns. Womanlike she was trying to stop the fight, was his thought. He would kill Joe and then the tenderfoot. The girl would then be his. He thrust his rifle forward.

Billie, the automatics hidden in the folds of her skirt, saw, in a flash of thought, that she must either kill or disable the treacherous outlaw who was about to murder the struggling men. She did not want to kill him, and so she concentrated on his hand, her mind seeming to dissolve into three glowing words—

"You can not miss."

She fired, and Charlie dropped his rifle. Then, with mouth open and eyes widened in a sort of dumb, animal stare, he looked at his hand. The trigger-finger and thumb, what was left of them were black with blood.

"Hands up!" shrilled the girl.

Slowly, as one who believes he is the victim of some ghastly joke, Charlie raised his hands.

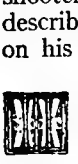
The shot momentarily checked Joe, giving Ethelbert an opportunity to twist over and buckle up.

Then came Billie's triumphant cry:

"You can whip him, Ethelbert! I've got the other man!"

Futility began sapping Joe's strength. She loved this tenderfoot. She had the drop on Charlie.

But to Ethelbert her ringing, triumphant words were like fresh reserves to an anxious general. With a mighty twist he whipped his arm back and around his antagonist's neck, and heaved him over. Joe's six-shooter slipped from the holster, as his legs described an arc in the air. He crashed on his back.



BILLIE toed the gun back out of reach of the fighters, and stood on the barrel.

Joe twisted over, struggled to his knees, and finally gained his feet, Ethelbert coming up with him. He turned in Ethelbert's arms, and broke free. They began slugging.

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Billie watched the slugging match with one eye; the other she kept on Charlie who was beginning to groan with the agony of his wound. His suffering finally aroused Billie's sympathy. She disarmed him, and ordered him to seat himself on the ground.

"You can hold your wrist," she told him, "but don't make any false moves. If I have to shoot again, I will not be so merciful."

Charlie obeyed her, convinced that a girl who could shoot a rifle out of a man's hands could also kill with equal ease.

The slugging match continued until the two men were nearly blinded with blood. Then it came to Joe that this awkward but determined tenderfoot was his equal. Even as the thought came to him, Ethelbert's fist crashed against his jaw. Immediately he sought the safety of a clinch, and again they crashed to the ground, Ethelbert uppermost.

"Give it to him, Ethelbert!" cried Billie as wildly exultant as any lady shouting encouragement to her knight.

Joe was now convinced that he was losing the fight. At the unbearable thought of being beaten, he forgot his pride and sense of fairness, and began clawing for his six-shooter, unaware that he had lost it. This gave Ethelbert time to raise up and land a smashing blow on the angle of the outlaw's jaw.

"Served you right for trying to get your gun," exulted Billie. "Take your medicine, Mr. Hold-up Man! I've got his gun, Ethelbert! Go on, go on! You're winning."

That smashing blow rocked Joe's consciousness. He made an ineffectual attempt to seize Ethelbert's wrists.

So this man had tried to shoot him. The cold killing rage surged up within Ethelbert. He would choke the life out of this treacherous thing beneath him. His fingers sank into the outlaw's throat, and by chance his thumbs found the soft spot just below the Adam's apple. Some long-latent bulldog strain stirred viciously within him. He would hold that grip through all eternity.

Feebly Joe struggled, but at last his arms dropped. Ethelbert hitched himself forward to add weight to that implacable grip. Joe's tongue protruded, and a horrid whistling sound answered the ever-increasing pressure of Ethelbert's thumbs.

To Ethelbert nothing now existed save the fleshy column which his hands gripped.

"Stop it!" Billie screamed, as the whistling sound changed to short hoarse gasps. "You're killing him!"

Ethelbert heard her faintly. Killing him? Of course he was killing him; that was the one great idea.

Billie tapped him lightly on the head with the barrel of one of her automatics to awaken him from his battle-trance.

"Get up!" she cried triumphantly. "You've whipped him!"

Reluctantly Ethelbert relinquished his grip. For a moment he stared down at the outlaw's ghastly face, and then, after several efforts, arose. His shirt, what was left of it from his previous fights, was now a few tatters hanging from the collar-band. His shoulders sagged forward, and his arms hung limply. He saw Charlie as through a red haze.

"Another one," he mumbled thickly; and staggered toward the outlaw.

"Ethelbert!" screamed Billie. "Wake up!"

He halted, swaying groggily. The red mist cleared a little.

"Fight them all," he mumbled, "all of them—every last one of them!"

"Go over to the packs and rest," she advised. "You've done enough fighting."

He stared at her dully.

"My," she exclaimed, with a proud smile, "you're a wonderful fighter, Ethelbert, when you get started. I knew you were a winner. But you certainly look like you had fallen down-stairs."

There was no gushiness in Billie's nature.

"Ye'ah," he mumbled vaguely; and staggered toward the packs.

Billie watched Joe as he slowly revived. When he had struggled to a sitting posture, she twanged:

"Hold that position! I do not want to be forced to cripple you, too. Understand? Do not move."

Then to Ethelbert, over her shoulder:

"When you feel strong enough, I wish you would get that rope on my saddle and tie these men up. You'll find a knife in the frying-pan."

Ethelbert felt that he needed a good, long rest, but, after several minutes of dumb contemplation of his hands, he roused to action.

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Under Billie's direction he bound Charlie's legs and arms.

"I'll attend to your wound in a moment," the girl assured the bandit, as Ethelbert drew his elbows back. "But I'm not going to take any chances with either one of you."

JOE made no resistance as Ethelbert looped the rope around his legs. The girl stood back of the outlaw, automatics ready, tensed for instant action.

"Well," grumbled Joe, when the last knot was tied, "what you goin' to do with me now—leave me fer the coyotes?"

Billie moved forward and faced her captive.

"You're quite a problem to me," she admitted, frowning thoughtfully. "I could take you in and turn you over to the sheriff, but you seem to have some redeeming traits, and I want to give you a chance. You were a friend to Ethelbert, and you tried to be good to me. But wait, I must attend to your partner."

She secured her surgical case, and, with Ethelbert's somewhat shaky assistance, dressed Charlie's wound. Her gentle ministrations brought no word or sign of appreciation from the sullen bandit. He cursed under his breath, and glared about him like some trapped animal.

Joe, noting that ungrateful brutishness, was about to lash his partner with a string of smoking adjectives, when he remembered the girl, and abruptly switched to what he deemed a more polite form of condemnation.

"You're 'bout as grateful as a hog," he ground out, "a greasy, gruntin' hog. She ought to have killed you, and saved me the trouble. You figgered to put me and Binnsy out and then be the big chief. Don't think that busted paw will save you if I ever git loose."

"That's mostly talk," reproved Billie, as she began bathing Joe's battered face. "I've decided to give you a chance—that is, if you haven't been hopelessly bad."

She smiled at the expression of dumb pathos in the young outlaw's eyes.

"A man can see a heap of things in a little while—sometimes," he said contritely. "I see now that a man can't really win anything that don't come to him right.

"I shot a man," he went on mournfully. "I was a wild kid, and he bullied me into it. I got away, but they caught me. A big cow outfit was back of the man I'd dropped, and I knew I stood no show fer a fair trial. A Mexican girl slipped me a file—it wasn't much of a jail—and I broke out. Of course they put up a reward fer me, and I had to keep movin' and at the same time have somethin' to live on. I began rustlin' a few cattle—they was all doin' it—and then I throwed in with Higg, the old man that left us, and that—" he flung a somber glance at Charlie—"big slug there. We run the cattle across the Mexican line, and that's all—yet."

Billie turned briskly to Ethelbert who had been listening sympathetically to Joe's confession.

"We'll pack the burros, and then you can untie this boy's arms." Her brow wrinkled in a dubious frown. "But, I guess, we'll have to take their guns to avoid what daddy calls 'backsliding on purpose.' Mr. Joe now feels that he and his friend have pressing business in Mexico."

When the burros were packed, Billie suggested that Ethelbert take a short rest while she cooked breakfast.

"We won't need much," she added. "That's one good thing about daddy's iron grub-boxes—they are just as handy on a burro as on the ground."

When she had prepared the breakfast, the girl glanced quizzically at the outlaws.

"Would you like some hot coffee?" she asked pleasantly.

"I certainly wouldn't kick," came Joe's emphatic answer.

Charlie merely grunted. Yet, when Billie held a cup of coffee to his lips, he gulped down the steaming liquid. Then he gave Joe a sort of dazed look, and hastily grumbled—

"Thank ye, ma'am."

"Why, you're only part hog!" exclaimed Joe, startled at Charlie's surly concession to amity.

"Now," announced the girl as she approached Joe, "I am going to give you a drink of coffee, but first I want your promise to go straight."

"Kind little jailer," he quaintly observed, "that coffee smells mighty good." Then, solemnly, "Yes; I promise."

She held the cup to his lips.

"This for remembrance," she said softly.

Later, when the gray light of dawn swept into the cañon, Billie glanced about the camp and smiled happily.

"You can now untie his arms," she told

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Ethelbert, with a nod at Joe. "I've left them everything they need—bandages, medicine, everything. Follow me as quickly as you can."

She mounted her pony and rode through the alders, followed by the burros, the leading one of which bristled with the rifles and six-shooters of the outlaws. Once she looked back and waved farewell.

"Luck to you, Binnsy," Joe said earnestly, as Ethelbert untied the rope about his arms. "The girl couldn't pick a better man—even if you are a tenderfoot. I wish I could dance at your weddin'."

Ethelbert found speech difficult. He could only give Joe's hand a quick, strong shake. Then he mounted the horse of the departed Garcia and hurried after Billie.

A few moments later Joe was staring down contemptuously at Charlie.

"Only fer my promise to her," he declared, with a ferocity that made Charlie shrink, "I'd tromp your head in the ground and leave you fer coyote bait. But I'm goin' to turn over a new leaf and you will, too, if I have to kill you to make you."

Following this weirdly paradoxical statement, he began loosening Charlie's bonds.

THAT night Billie and Ethelbert camped at a palm-environed spring on the south side of the desert range. They had long since exchanged detailed accounts of their wanderings, and, though weary from their long ride, were as happy as two care-free children.

Ethelbert, now a passable camp-cook, prepared supper.

"You're just wonderful, dear," Billie complimented, as she helped him wash the dishes. "A great change has come over you, and I feel so happy. Something told me when I first saw you that the old desert would work wonders with you."

Later, when they were seated by the fire, he said thoughtfully:

"I can see now that the men I fought were really good friends of mine. Really, Billie, I haven't the slightest fear now of anything in the world—except that something might happen to you."

Silence. His hand found hers.

"I was just wondering," he confessed, "if you ever believed that blond woman meant anything to me. There was something very strange about the way she acted. I never saw her in my life before. Do you believe me?"

"Forget it," she advised.

With a smile of mock penitence, she shyly rubbed her chin on the shoulder farthest from Ethelbert.

The little fire crackled merrily, impudently flaunting its banners of flame at the solemn desert night.

Billie placed Ethelbert's arm around her, took his other hand in hers, and pressed it to her heart. Then, unmindful of battle-bruises or whiskers, she slowly turned her face to his.

Ethelbert kissed her.

Who wouldn't?

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THE HAUNTING OF THE LADY SHANNON

by William Hope Hodgson

Author of "Jack Grey, Second Mate," "The Real Thing," etc.

CAPTAIN JELLER had his men aft for a few brief words as the *Lady Shannon* wallowed down-channel in the wake of the tug. He explained very clearly that when he gave an order he expected that order to be obeyed with considerable haste or there would be "consequences."

Captain Jeller's vocabulary was limited and vulgar, and his choice of words therefore unpleasing; but there was no mistaking his meaning; and the crew went forward again, shaking their heads soberly.

"Just wot I said," remarked one of them, "he's a 'oly terror!"

In this there seemed to be a moody acquiescence on the part of the others; all except one, a young fellow, who muttered an audible threat that he would stick his knife into any one who hazed him.

"That's wot you thinks," returned the first speaker. "You just 'ave a try, an' you'll find 'arf a bloomin' ounce of lead in yer bloomin' gizzard!"

"That's so," added one of the older men with conviction. "Them sort allus carries a gun in their pocket, handy-like."

But the young man looked at the other two with a sullen, somewhat contemptuous stare.

"They wouldn't dare if you chaps stuck up to them. It's just because you let them haze you. You run if they breathe on you!"

"You just wait a bit, young feller," replied the second man. "Wait till one on 'em gets his knife into yer. I've sailed with them kind, an' you 'aven't. They've ways an' means as you've no idea of. You'll learn quick enough if you runs foul of one on 'em!"

The older man finished his warning with a solemn shake of the head, to which the young fellow replied nothing; but, turning, went into the fo'cas'le, swinging his shoulders unbelievingly.

"He'll be gettin' 'arf murdered," remarked the first man.

"Aye," returned the other. "He's young an' thinks he can 'old 'is own; but Lord help 'im if he runs foul of the afterguard!"

And they also went into the fo'cas'le.

Aft, in the "glory hole," three of the 'prentices—all youngsters—sat and regarded one another with dismayed looks.

"What an old brute he must be!" exclaimed Tommy, the youngest. "If my people had guessed he was like that there would have been ructions and no mistake."

"Well, youngster," put in Martin, an older lad who had done the previous trip with the skipper, "you're in a hot shop right

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enough; but you'll find it a darned sight hotter if you go talking like that with the door open. They can hear every word you say up on the poop; that is, if there's not much wind."

Tommy looked startled.

Martin continued, addressing the three of them:

"See here, youngsters; what you've got to do, is to fly like mad if they sing out for you to do anything, and whatever they do, never answer one of them back. Never!"

He repeated the last word with emphasis.

Tommy's eyes grew rounder.

"Why?" he said breathlessly. "What do you think they would do?"

"Do? Goodness knows! Anything, I believe. Last trip they treated one of the ordinaries so badly that the poor chap went queer—silly. Mind you, he acted like a goat and gave both the second mate and the skipper slack; but they knocked all that out of him and some of his brains as well, I believe. Anyway he went half-dotty before the end of the voyage."

"Why didn't the men interfere?" questioned the boy, warmly.

"Interfere? Not they! And if they had the old man would have shot them down like a lot of sheep."

"Didn't you tell when you got home?"

Martin shrugged his shoulders.

"Not I. The youngster cleared out—disappeared. Besides who was I to tell, and what could I have said? They'd have shut me up anyway."

"I'd never have come on the same ship again—never!"

"That depends," replied Martin. "I tried to get shoved into another but it was no use. And wouldn't I have looked pretty now if I had gone 'round telling how Toby the ordinary seaman was used by the old man and the second? Wouldn't I be in for a nice time of it, eh? "

Tommy nodded gravely; yet his eyes were reproachful.

"Still, I think you ought to have told, even——"

"Oh, stow it!" exclaimed Martin, cutting him short. " Wait until you've had the old man down on top of you; then you can begin to gas."

Tommy wisely made no reply, but began talking with the two others in a low voice; while Martin lay back in his bunk and smoked.

II

DURING the next few days the *Lady Shannon* had a fine fair wind which took her well away from the land, the captain making a course sufficiently to the westward to clear the bay.

Now that they were in blue water there was no mistaking the after-guard's intentions to make things hum for the "crowd." There was no afternoon watch below, and work was kept up right through the second dog-watch, while instead of turning the men to washing down at 6 A.M. it was buckets and brooms—and holystones—as soon as the morning watch was relieved at 4 o'clock.

All this as may be imagined developed a very fair amount of grumbling among the men; but after three or four had been laid out by the first and second mates with the aid of a belaying-pin the grumbling was confined to the inside of the fo'cas'le, and the crowd bade fair to submit quietly enough to treatment far worse than would be meted out to any convict in one of our prisons.

Yet, as it happened, there was one man with sufficient pluck to make a stand for the sake of the manhood within him, and this was Jones, the young fellow who had sworn he would not be hazed.

So far he had been sufficiently fortunate to escape the attentions of the second mate, in whose watch he was.

On the twelfth day out, however, came violent friction between them. The men were holystoning at the time, and the second, on the lookout for trouble, was "bouncing" 'round the decks and keeping them at it. Suddenly he saw Jones biting off a chew.

"Darn you, you terbaccer-eating hog!" he roared. "You just throw that plug over the side an' put some of your dirty beef on ter that stone!"

But Jones did no such thing. Instead, he slipped the plug back into his pocket. In an instant the second mate was beside him.

"I'll teach you not to do what I tell you!" he snarled, and pushed the kneeling man over on to the muddy decks with a rough thrust of his boot.

Jones fell on his right side and the plug of hard tobacco tumbled out from his pocket among the slime of water, dirt, and

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mud-colored sand. Immediately the second stooped for it and the next instant it was over the side.

"Get a hold of that stone!" he bellowed. "Smart now, or I'll knock the dirty face off you!"

He gave a clumsy kick with his heavy sea-boot as he spoke.

The kick took Jones in a slanting graze across his right shin-bone and he gave a curse of pain. Then he scrambled on to his knees.

"Thought that'd fetch you!" said the second mate grimly. "Get ahead with that there stonin' if you don't want any more!"

Jones made no reply and no move to go on with his work; but just stared wrathfully up at the officer.

"—— you!" he burst out at last.

"That's it, is it!" exclaimed the second, and ran to the starboard pin-rail from whence he took a heavy iron belaying-pin. He returned at a run.

"Now then you dirty son of a sea-horse!" he roared. "I'll show you! You open your blabby mouth to me!"

He raised the pin as he pointed to the holystone.

"Pick it up!" he shouted. "Pick it up an' get to work or I'll knock you inter next week!"

Jones picked up the great lump of holystone with an air of apparent submissiveness, but instead of beginning to work it across the gritty deck he suddenly raised it in both hands and brought it down with a squashing thud upon the second mate's right foot. The officer gave out a loud yell of agony, dropped the belaying-pin, raised his injured member, slipped and came down stern-foremost among the muck of sandy mud.

The next instant Jones had flown at him like a tiger and taking him by the throat had forced him down upon his back and commenced banging his head against the deck. The men had ceased their stoning and were looking on in mingled terror and delight.

All at once from the direction of the poop there came the sound of running footsteps; they passed along the narrow gangway which led to the little bridge, standing upon four stanchions in the middle of the after part of the main-deck.

"Ther old man!" called some one in a voice of fear; but Jones, mad with anger, was past noticing.

The following moment the skipper's face appeared over the bridge-rail, his face livid with rage. He held a revolver.

"Jeerusalem! You strike my officer! Take that! An' that! An' that!"

He was firing indiscriminately among the men upon the deck. Evidently he had been drinking, for though it was plain that he desired to perforate Jones, he only succeeded in shooting one of the other men through the calf of the leg.

Then, save for Jones and the second mate, the decks were empty of men. They had run like sheep. Up on the bridge the captain was clicking his revolver impotently. It had not been loaded in all its chambers, and he had fired off the full ones.

From further aft the first mate appeared in his shirt and trousers. He caught sight of the struggle from the break of the poop, and straight away made two jumps of the ladder on to the main-deck. Reaching the place where Jones was worrying the almost senseless officer, he took a flying kick at him, but with no effect. At that he stooped and caught him by the collar, reaching at the same time for the heavy pin which the second mate had dropped.

"Let go, you rotten fool!" he shouted, raising the pin.

"Let go, you ——!" obscenely echoed the skipper from the bridge overhead.

At the same time he hurled his empty revolver at Jones. The flying weapon took the first mate on the top of the head and he went down in a heap without knowing what had struck him.

From the doorway of the 'prentices' berth there came a shrill "Hurray!" in a boy's voice. It was from Tommy, who had thus involuntarily voiced his delight at the turn which the affair had taken. The skipper caught the word and turned wrathfully. He saw Tommy and immediately threw his leg over the edge of the bridge-rail. Dropping to the main-deck, he went for the boy.

"You puppy-faced poop ornament!" he snarled. "You dare ter open your biscuit-hatch at me!"

He seized him by the back of the neck and ran him to the starboard rail. Here, grasping the end of the mizzen lower topsail brace, he shifted his grip to the youngster's arm. Then with the heavy brine-sodden rope he struck the boy furiously, beating

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out from him little gasping sobs. In his savage, half-drunken state he took no note of where he struck, and under one of the blows, which caught Tommy across the back of the neck, the boy went suddenly limp within his grasp.

Behind him there came a curse in the mate's voice, a dull thud and a quick choking cry from Jones, another blow, followed by a slight gurgle and then silence.

The skipper opened his hand and Tommy slid down on to the deck—quietly; then tossing down the rope-end across him he turned rapidly to see the first mate, recovered from the result of the misaimed pistol, in the act of dragging the limp body of Jones off the second mate.

Taking not the least notice of the huddled boy upon the deck, the captain walked for'ard a few steps and looked down at the insensible second. Then he roared for the steward to bring some whisky. When this was brought they forced some between the second mate's lips and when he came 'round applied the bottle to their own; after which, with the help of the steward, they got the battered officer to his room.

Returning on deck the skipper sang out for two of the men to lay aft and carry Jones for'ard. Tommy had been removed to his bunk by the 'prentices, immediately the captain and the mates left the deck and now Martin was busily engaged in bathing his head with some salt water.

III

IT WAS two nights later, in the first watch. The second mate had shaken off the effects of his hammering sufficiently to return to duty. To himself he had vowed that Jones—if he lived—should suffer terribly before the ship reached port. But Jones was still in a state of semiconsciousness, due to the blows that the first mate had dealt him; so that for the present the second mate had to curb his hatred and wait.

Four bells had gone and it was full night, with a bright moon shining. For a while the captain and the second mate had paced the poop, conversing on various topics, chief of which was the grinding of all insubordination out of the men. Presently in response to an order of the captain's the second mate made his way along the narrow gangway—elevated some ten feet above the main-deck—to the little bridge on its four teak uprights.

Upon the bridge was placed the "Standard" compass. In addition to the compass there were a couple of rows of wooden ornamental poop-buckets, while up through the deck of the little bridge rose a ventilator. Nothing else was kept upon the bridge; so that what followed the captain was enabled to see plainly. He saw the second mate step up to the compass and peer in at the lighted card. Then came his voice—

"Sou——"

It broke off horribly with a hoarse scream and the captain saw him throw up his arms and fall backward on to the bridge deck. Completely astounded and puzzled the skipper ran hastily along the gangway to him.

"What's up with you, Mr. Buston?" he asked, stooping over him; but the second gave back no reply.

At last the skipper reached for the binnacle-lamp. Slipping it from its place he threw the light upon the prostrate mate. It showed him the face, curiously distorted. From that his glance passed to a thin stream which trickled from beneath the man. He knelt down and turned him half over. The blood came from the back of the right shoulder.

He stood up, releasing the body, and it fell back with an inert sagging of the shoulders. He felt dazed and frightened. The thing had happened before his eyes, within twenty feet of him; yet he had seen nothing that would account for it.

The bridge stood up above the main-deck like an island and was reached only by the gangway which led from the poop. But even if this had not been so it did not seem possible that any one could have touched the second mate without the captain being aware of it. The more he turned the matter over the more he realized how inexplicable it was. Then a sudden idea came to him and he glanced upward. Had a knife or a spike been dropped from aloft? He thought not. Had that been the case then the instrument would have been visible—and there was none. Besides, the wound was behind.

Had it been caused by any one dropping a knife or spike, then it would have been in the head or top of the shoulders. There was a similar objection to supposing that

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a weapon had been thrown at him from the deck below. In that case the wound would have been in the front or one of the sides. It was no use; he could not solve the mystery.

He gathered his wits somewhat and bellowed to one of the 'prentices to go and call the mate. Another he sent for'ard to order every man, watch below as well as watch on deck, to lay aft. He would at least know the whereabouts of each of the crew.

The first mate came running with his gun in his hand. It was evident that he was incurably expectant of trouble. While the men were mustering the skipper told the first mate all that he knew.

As soon as the men were aft the captain made each one pass below the bridge under the light from the binnacle-lamp. Every man was thus discovered to be there, except Jones. Then the 'prentices were mustered, and all came forward except Tommy. As soon as this was done the skipper told the men to stay where they were. Then he ordered the mate to go and see if the missing man and boy were in their respective bunks. In a few minutes the first mate returned to say that they were. Then the captain dismissed the men; but without telling them of the tragedy which had occurred.

As soon as they had gone he turned to the first mate.

"See you 'ere, Mr. Jacob," he said. "Do you think as that dirty carkiss for'ard is as bad as 'e seems?"

"Yes, sir," replied the mate. "It's not him, if that's what you're thinking. He looks as if it was his turn next to slip off the hooks."

"An' ther b'y?"

The mate shook his head.

"No, sir. He's not got over that warming you gave him by a long chalk."

"If I thought——" began the skipper; but broke off short.

"Yes, sir?"

The skipper threw the light down on to the dead man.

"Wot's done it?" he asked in a voice denoting that he was at the end of his imagination. "Wot's done it?"

"Well, sir, it must be one of the lousy crowd for'ard."

"One of ther crowd! Do you think as one of them'd be livin' if I'd thought as it was them!"

The first mate made no reply, and the captain continued.

"It ain't nothin' 'uman as 'as done this 'ere."

He stirred the body with the toe of his boot as he spoke. "You think, sir——"

"I don't think nothin'! I'm a long way past thinkin'. Why! I saw 'im killed with me own eyes. He was just struck dead standin' 'ere in ther moonlight. There weren't nothin' come near 'im, an' there ain't no signs of a knife, nor nothin'. I reckon as it's some one as 'e's done for, some time or another."

The mate glanced 'round the decks, silent and ghostly under the moonlight. Though he was a fairly intelligent man, it was plain that he felt a chill of unease.

The skipper went on with his uncomfortable theorizing:

"It's a dead man's ghost!" he said. "W'en that hog for'ard, as you done for, slips 'is cable, strikes me as you'll be 'aving a call—sudden!"

He touched the body with his foot, suggestively.

"I didn't know that you were superstitious, sir," said the mate.

The captain turned and looked at him steadily.

"You knowed right then," he said at length. "I ain't, but I ain't a blind fool neither! An' when I sees one of me officers knifed before me eyes, an' nothin' in sight, you can bet as I give in ter facts. I never was narrer, an' wot me eyes shows me I believes. You can take it from me right off as ther's something in this 'ere packet as ain't 'uman."

He waved the light over the dead second mate.

"I reckon as 'e's been a bad un!" he remarked, as though to himself.

Then, as if coming suddenly to his everyday self, he gave a slight shiver which he turned off into a shrug.

" 'Ere, Mr. Jacob, let's get outer this 'ere," he said.

And he led the way, followed closely by the first mate, off the bridge. On the poop he turned to the mate.

"You take charge, mister. I'm goin' down for a snooze. I reckon you can shift 'im—" jerking his thumb toward the bridge —"as soon as it's daylight."

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IV

DURING the following day the captain indulged in a heavy, solitary drinking-bout; and on finding out from the steward that the skipper was hopelessly drunk the first mate took upon himself to put the second over the side. He did not fancy another night with that thing aboard.

That the first mate had taken the extraordinary event of the night to heart, was common talk in the fo'cas'le; for he relaxed entirely his bullying attitude to the men and in addition on three separate occasions sent word for'ard to learn how Jones was progressing. It may be that the skipper's theorizing of the preceding night had something to do with this sudden display of sympathy.

With the captain being drunk, the first mate had to take all the night-watches. This he managed by having one of the older men up on the poop a portion of the time to keep a lookout, while he himself got a little rest upon the seat of the saloon skylight. Yet it was evident to the man whom he had called to keep him company, that the mate obtained little sleep; for every now and again he would sit up and listen anxiously.

Once he went so far as to call the man to him and ask if he could not hear something stirring on the bridge. The man listened, and thought perhaps that he did; but he could not be sure. At that the mate stood up excitedly and ordered him to go for'ard and find out how Jones was. Much surprized, the man did as he was bid, returning to say that he seemed queer and that the men in the fo'cas'le thought he was slipping his cable and would the first mate go for'ard and have a look at him.

But this the mate would by no means do. Instead he sent the man along to the fo'cas'le every bell and between whiles he himself stood by the rail across the break of the poop. Twice he called to the man to come and listen, and the second time the man agreed that there certainly was a noise on the little bridge. After that the mate continued to stand where he was, glancing 'round about him frightenedly, a very picture of shattered nerves.

At half-past two in the morning the man came back from one of his visits for'ard to say that Jones had just gone. Even as he delivered himself of the news there came a distinct grating sound from the direction of the bridge. They both turned and stared; but though the moonlight was full upon everything there was nothing visible. The man and the mate faced one another—the man startled, the mate sweating with terror.

"My ——!" said the man. "Did yer 'ear that, sir?"

The mate replied nothing; his lips quivered beyond his control.

Presently the dawn came.

In the morning the skipper appeared on deck. He seemed quite sober. He found the first mate haggard and nervous, standing beside the poop rail.

"I guess you'd best get below an' 'ave er sleep, Mr. Jacob," he remarked, stepping over to him. "You look as if you was spun out."

The first mate nodded in a tired manner but beyond that made no reply. The skipper looked him up and down.

"Anythin' 'appened while I was—was below?" he asked, as though the mate's manner suggested the thought.

"Jones has gone," replied the mate harshly.

The captain nodded as though the mate's reply answered some further question.

"I s'pose you dumped 'im?" he said, nodding toward the bridge, where the second mate had lain.

The mate nodded.

"Seen—or 'eard anythin'?" beckoning again toward the bridge.

The first mate straightened himself up from the rail and looked at the skipper.

"Directly after Jones went, there was something messing about yonder." He jerked his thumb toward the bridge. "Stains heard it as well."

The captain made no immediate reply. He appeared to be digesting this piece of information.

"I sh'd keep clear of ther bridge, Mr. Jacob, if I was you," he remarked at length.

A slight flush rose in the mate's face.

"I heard from one of the boys that young Tommy seems pretty shaky this morning," he replied with apparent irrelevance.

"—— ther b'y!" growled the captain.

Then, glancing at the mate—

"You think——"

His gaze followed the mate's to the bridge and he did not finish.

It was noticeable after the mate had

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gone below that the captain for the first time made inquiries as to the state of Tommy's health. At first he sent the steward; the second time he went himself. It was a memorable fact.

V

THAT night the captain and the mate kept the first watch together. At the beginning, before it was quite dark, they paced the poop and kept up an irregular conversation; but now that it was night they had drifted to the for'ard poop-rail and there leaned, scarcely speaking once in a couple of minutes.

To a close observer their attitudes might have suggested that they were listening intently. Once it seemed there came a faint sound through the darkness, from the direction of the bridge, whereat the first mate babbled out something in a strained, husky voice.

"You keep ther stopper on, Mr. Jacob," said the skipper, "else you'll be goin' barmy."

After that there was nothing further until the moon rose, which it did board away on the starboard bow. At first it gave little or no light, the horizon being somewhat cloudy. Presently its upper edge came into sight above the "Standard" binnacle, framing the bulging brass dome with a halo of misty light that gave it for the minute almost a curiously unreal spectral appearance. The light grew plainer, casting grotesque but indistinct shadows.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a strange husky inhuman gurgle from the bridge. The skipper started; but the mate never moved; only his face shone white in the glowing light. The captain could see that the little bridge was clear of all life. Abruptly as he stared there came from it a low, incredible, abominable laughter. The effect upon the mate was extraordinary. He stood up with a jerk, shaking from head to foot.

"He's come for me!" he said, his voice rising into an insane quavering shout.

From forrard and aft there came the sound of running feet. His wild cry had brought out the crew.

From the bridge there came a further sound, vague, and, to the captain, meaningless. But it had meaning to the mate.

"Coming!" he screamed in a voice as shrill as a woman's.

He sprang away from the skipper's side, and ran stumbling along the narrow gangway to the bridge.

"Come back, you fool!" roared the captain. "Come back!"

The mate took no notice, and the skipper made a rush for him. He had reached the bridge and flung his arms about the "Standard" binnacle. He appeared to be wrestling with it. The captain seized him by the arm and tried to tear him away; but it was useless. Suddenly as the skipper struggled something bright flashed over his shoulder, past his ear, and the mate went slowly limp and slid down upon the deck.

The captain wrenched around and stared. Exactly what he saw no one knew. The grouped men beneath heard him shout hoarsely. Then he came flying over the bridge-rail down among them. They broke and ran a few yards. Something else came down over the rail. Something white and slender that ran upon the captain noiselessly. The captain dodged, rushing sidewise with his head down. He butted into the steel side of the deck-house and crumpled up.

"Catch it, mates," shouted one of the men, and ran among the shadows.

The rest, inspired by his courage, closed about in a semicircle. The decks were still very dim and indistinct.

"Where is it?" came in a man's voice.

"There—there—no——"

"It's on ther spar," cut in some one. "It's ——"

"Overboard!" came in a chorus, and there was a general rush for the side.

"There weren't no splash," said one of the men presently, and no one contradicted him.

Yet whether this was so or not Martin, the oldest 'prentice, insisted that the white thing had reminded him of Toby the ordinary seaman, who had been hazed to the verge of insanity by the brutality of the captain and officers on the previous voyage.

"It's the way his knees went," he explained. "We used to call him 'Knees' before he went queer."

There is little doubt but that it was Toby who, in his half-insane condition, had stowed away and worked out a terrible

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vengeance upon his tormentors. Though, of course, it can not be proved.

When after a sleepless excited night the crew of the *Lady Shannon* made a search of the bridge they found traces of flour upon the bridge-deck, while the mouth and throat of the ventilator in the center of the bridge was dusted with the same whiteness.

Inspired by these signs to doubt their superstitions they unshipped the after hatch and made a way to where the lower end of the ventilator opened above the water-tanks. Here they found further traces of flour and in addition discovered that the manhole-lid of the port tank was unshipped.

Searching 'round, they saw that a board was loose in the partition enclosing the tanks from the surrounding hold. This they removed and came upon more flour—the ship was loaded with this commodity—which led them finally to a sort of nest amid the cargo. Here were fragments of food, a tin hook-pot, a bag of stale bread and some ship's biscuits; all of which tended to show that some one had been stowed away there. Close at hand was an open flour barrel.

Toby had crawled at night from his hiding-place to the ventilator and, concealed there, had stabbed the officers as they came within reach.

Tommy regained his health, as did both Captain Jeller and Jacob, the mate; but as a "hard-case" skipper and a "buck-o" mate, they are no longer shining examples.

THE AEROPLANE

BY LYDIA M. D. O'NEIL

THE earth goes by below me, the earth that my wide wings spurn;
To the sunlit heights beyond the clouds, the topmost clouds, I yearn.
No taint of the soil, no fetter of town or of brackish foam
May swing through the upper spaces or follow me where I roam.
Heavy the fog-banks hover, and the cold rain slants between,
But aloft the dome is golden, and the air is sweet and clean.
And up from the murky fog-banks, and up from the earth-bound clods,
I soar to the central heavens, a singing child of the gods!

Icarus, you lived too early and you dreamed your dreams too soon;
Mine are the wings would bear you to the gold-rimmed horns of the moon.
No thunder-shock may fright me, nor sun's heat lay me low;
I climb the path of the moonbeams, I go where the comets go.
I veer like a wind-blown blossom; I soar as the eagles soar;
I swoop in the falcon's fashion; I have learned the falcon's lore.
Like a leaf that the wind has lifted, or a fleck of wave-whirled foam,
I drift as your dreams have drifted, the heights of the sky my home.

There is never a hill may bar me; there is never a sea may bind;
Though their hands reach forth to hold me, I leave them far behind.
The shifting sands of the desert the feet of a man may snare,
But my wide wings beat above them, as I climb to the upper air.
Treeless and trackless, boundless, the paths that I follow far;
Moonlit or sunlit, soundless as the world's waste places are.
And up from the steaming marshes, and up from the sands and sods,
I soar to the central heavens, a singing child of the gods!

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FINISH THE FIGHT by Eugene P. Lyle Jr.

Author of "The Great Foolishness."

THAT a man cooks himself no broth by stirring the devil's fire is a true thought, but it is too often an afterthought, which holds back the millennium, an instance being the case of Sigel Tench.

Like a toad in a stagnant pool, or supposedly like a toad therein, Sigel Tench gathered venom from baffled desire and other men's fairer fortune. He was independent assayer at Shale-and-Shucks, the shell of a town. As a camp, its soul had passed on. There was still a lone chlorination plant in operation. A desultory cleaning-up was going on in remote drifts under hills blotched with dumps and ramshackle hoist-houses.

Trains stopped on signal, for there was indeed a railroad, warped out of its course in the heyday of big ore tonnage; and because of the railroad Shale-and-Shucks gasped on, mostly as an outfitting point for prospectors. Invariably the prospectors returned to outfit anew, bringing rock. Always they brought rock, and they asked Sigel Tench to find out what was in it for them.

The years unto his own middle age found Tench still putting the seal of failure, or even of success, on the ventures of hardier spirits who gambled largely and gallantly with life. He was like a bank teller counting other people's money, bitterly mouthing the reflection that the money is never his own. Other men's hopes went into the white heat of Sigel Tench's furnace and had their test of fire. Naught of chance was in this for Tench; only his stipend. He might have been a tailor sewing on buttons, though the buttons glistening like molten pearls in his bone-ash cupels were of silver, of gold, of silver and gold.

Sometimes it was a fairly personable bonanza that he had to pass out to the desert-seasoned customer awaiting his verdict, so that secret envy had become Tench's habit and a part of him, and his very features had set heavily in the mould of rancor. It drew his round jet eyes to a lowering focus, and deepened the creases between the tufted yellow brows. Under the thick, spreading base of his nose it tightened his lips till the lower pursed outward in an aspect of sullen malevolence. The man's brawn had softened with his shiftless mode of life, and he looked squat and sluggish, whereas he was huge of frame.

When a prospector's rock of hope passed off in vapor, leaving no button, this Sigel Tench bared yellow teeth and laughed. The disappointment of others soothed his own. But when, as sometimes truly happened, a miserable desert-rat at last brought in float embodying fortune, Sigel Tench did not laugh. An oft-scorned failure mocking him with the fleer of success was a slap in the face, and Tench's fat, dead-clay face purpled under it.

Then one day Jim came back—Jim Cairn, who was the most chronic and dogged and preposterously hopeful failure of them all. Jim Cairn was everlastingly coming back, a

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lean, tawny, upstanding creature off the tawny desert; and while yet afar his big mouth and the sun-crinkles about his blue eyes would break into laughter to be with his own again—his own being Mary and Mr. Cairn. Mr. Cairn was the baby. Generally Jim came back with a prospect, and his coming was to take Mary and Mr. Cairn with him, and blithely Mary and Mr. Cairn would go, she to see that Jim had edible biscuits with his molasses while he did his assessment on the prospect.

They had the pioneering spirit in joyful measure, these two, and Mary was as bad as Jim. Her faith in Jim's unrisen star never faltered. When the prospect pinched out, as of course it always did, she taught school some more at Shale while Jim raised another grub-stake as shift-boss or even at mucking. Then, when Jim had had another try at the desert and came back for her, she was always ready.

Now on Sigel Tench's heart of gall, Jim Cairn was as balm. No other so neutralized the vitriol as he with his persistency and his dreams and his labor lost. He was so contemptibly a fool—doubly a fool. He was prospecting a second time those Nevada Sierras which he had already prospected once, and his whimsically unruffled explanation checked Tench's mirth only because Tench needs must spit forth his disgust:

"Enh-henh, I get the idea. Decided to turn up another Cripple Creek? Hunh—beautiful, beautiful."

This was ribald sacrilege, for every prospector in his secret heart hopes to do just that. Jim Cairn blushed under his desert tan at being found out. He protested that any little old diggings would do for his; Cripple Creek was just new dope to lead him to it. And hadn't Cripple Creek been prospected over and over? Hadn't it now? Yet look how none of those old prospectors with their wise old noses had smelled a sign, and all the time the crust of the earth under their feet was rotten with it. Same with the highbrow experts—the geologists. They'd as soon have looked for oysters in birds' nests as for gold in any such formation. Then what? Well, the gold was there, wasn't it—right there in the granite? Well, you'd pretty near reckon so.

Jim hazily remembered stumbling over a gray ledge somewhere, back in the days before Cripple Creek when he was a green kid, and the ledge was flecked with silvery particles exactly like this sylvanite stuff that had foooled 'em so long at Cripple Creek. All he had to do was find the ledge again and he'd sure have a mine. He hunted for two years. He amplified Sigel Tench's notion of a fool, and was Tench's chief solace in life.

Imagine, therefore, Jim Cairn's return to Shale with the news that he had found the ledge and staked his claim. He brought a nose-bag of samples chipped from the ledge.

"Enh-henh," sneered Tench when he had assayed them. "Sixty-three dollars a ton!"

But it would get richer with depth, argued Jim; plenty rich enough to offset transportation and treatment. Tench sniffed, but his black, metallic eyes held a steadfast glitter as he listened. And during the time that Jim buoyantly outfitted, Tench mid the dust and dead flies of his office moped like a disgruntled slug of gloom. He knew it for his cursed luck if Jim—Jim particularly—did strike it rich. The thing became a dread, a goading superstition.

If a damnable and ironic Fate were still on the job, then it would be this same Jim Cairn of all men whom she would chose for her darling in order to administer a neat back-hander on the gangrenous sensibilities of Sigel Tench.

For Jim was not only the most despised of failures; he was also Tench's brother-in-law. That is to say, they had married sisters. Tench's wife had since died, worn out, her attractiveness used up, but Tench could not bear that Mary should have the material symbol of happiness—assuming that wealth means happiness—as proof that she had chosen better than the poor dead sister. In the end Tench could stand it no longer. He ate crow—the black crow of his mockery—and asked Jim to take him along, too. Jim grinned cheerfully and said—

"Why, of course."

JIM had hired Shale's most prominent mule-skinner to team the bulk of his stuff, and into the covered wagon he tucked Mary and Mr. Cairn. Tench's trunk and bundles were also crowded on, and Tench crowded himself on beside the driver. Jim trudged behind, with the two pack-donkeys. For three days they moved southwestward in a craggy desolation where there was neither trail nor wagon-track, but only the earth rough-hewn and raw, without its nap of greenery.

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"Sixty-three-dollar ore and three days by wagon!" growled Tench, sore from grievance and the jolting ride. "Mary Cairn, I'm a fool too, same as you."

"No, you're more so, Sigel," said Mary, "because I am a contented one."

They camped the third night at the mouth of a wide ravine that Jim had christened Greasewood Gulch, and here the next morning they unloaded the wagon and used the horses as pack-animals for the ascent of the ravine. On the way Jim picked up a grayish rock unlike the dun-fallow and reddish hues of the slope.

"Blossom rock — float," he said. He scraped an edge with his thumb-nail and they saw that it was shot through with silvery flecks. "Stuff lying all around this side the ravine, but no out-croppings. Reckon they're covered over with loose wash, like at Cripple Creek."

But the float had started him up the ravine and he had kept on, and he led them, retracing his course. After a time the gulch narrowed, and there was jack-pine and scrub-oak. They came to moisture in the ravine bed, then to gravel that was wet, and finally to a trickling flow. Beyond was the waterhole itself, a clear spring in a glen, the thicket gray-green with leafage.

"And when I'd clumb this far," said Jim, "I went and remembered. It was the same durned identical spot where I'd camped a whole week once."

Veteran trailer that he was, and tough desert-man sun-dried and weathered, his were still the rapturous eyes of a boy as he announced:

"And it was here I'd seen the granite ledge. Shucks, I'd kindled my fire plumb against it. Right there, folks, right there!"

The gray outcropping humped itself out of the mountainside like the backbone of a razorback. Where the rock was blackened by Jim's camp-fires, Tench lumbered down on his fat knees and scraped the smutted rock with his knife. He pointed then to flecks in the granite, smaller than pin-heads, but they were no longer like silver. They were of the rich, mellow yellow of old gold; and they were gold, roasted to their true color in the heat of Jim's camp-fires long ago. Had Jim but known, then, the color he was leaving behind—the key to Cripple Creek's thousand bonanzas as yet undiscovered.

Tench got heavily to his feet and looked about him. His scowl pressed one eye to a narrower slit than the other as he noted each little heap of stones that marked the corners of Jim's location. These were the monuments—grotesque word.

But they bounded all that the mountain within the indicated lines might hold of yachts and mansions, of daily bread and feasts and foreign travel, of piano-players and gramaphones and pipes and tobacco and chocolate éclairs, of college and the world's opportunity for one small boy, and of her every heart's desire for the one woman; and title to all of these therein contained was vested in the said James Cairn, for which see the location notice in the sardine can buried in the central monument.

There remained but a certain prescribed amount of digging, of shaft-sinking, of brow sweat, which the law quaintly required in evidence of good faith.

Tench observed that the long rectangle described by the monuments, running lengthwise with the steep slope, enclosed the twenty feet or more of granite ledge, and that the side lines on either side ran parallel with the ledge.

"The hog!" grumbled Tench. "The hog has staked the apex!"

"But Jim told you he did," Mary reminded him.

"And I've got only just as much as what lies between my end lines," said Jim. "Extend my side lines for your location, sink your shaft on a line with the outcropping, and you'll come down astraddle the apex your own self."

"Down? How far down?"

"I'd judge the ledge don't dip much——"

"You'd judge?"

"You're dead right, Sig. It's your hand; play it to suit yourself. Only I'm not taking a pardner, understand? And you can still take the wagon back, you know."

But Sigel Tench did not take the wagon back. He stayed. Dread that Jim's prospect would develop into a second Gold Hill held him. He stayed, and located for himself between an extension of Jim's side lines. With Jim's help he built a lean-to shack that was half dug-out against the face of the slope. Here, in unpleasant contrast to Jim's snug little cabin opposite, he relapsed into the slothful housekeeping of his widower life in Shale. Nor would he permit Mary to "tidy things up." Ungraciously he fitted a chain and padlock to the door.

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He allowed Mary and Jim to feed him, though, stomach prevailing over sullen pride.

Also he was willing to trade labor with Jim when it came to drilling, as it was Jim who mostly swung the sledge and he who held the drill. Besides, on Jim's claim, Jim's progress in sinking on the ledge had a rabid fascination for him. After a shot, he was first back to the shallow hole, pawing the shattered granite, scowling at the newly exposed rock. Nothing incensed him so much as Jim's stout hopes. Streaming sweat, Jim grounded the sledge to say:

"I'm telling you, Sig, some day there'll be big slugger drills in this rock, breaking down twenty-thirty feet of the breast a day."

"Wait, wait!" Tench begged with elaborate and nasty sarcasm. "Wait and see how much more she's pinched out since the last sampling."

"Well, gee whiz," said Jim, "I hope to breakfast I don't take it so thundering hard as you do!"

But he could not help looking dashed and puzzled. He picked up a fragment and shook his head and declared it certainly looked richer, anyhow.

"All right," snorted Tench. "I'll find out what's in it for you."

Such selected specimens Tench in the privacy of his shack ground to a pulp and treated with quicksilver. From the amalgam he extracted the gold, which he weighed. With a pencil stub he then could calculate, his brow thickening over the scribbled figures. Bitterly he rendered his findings.

"See for yourself, poor yap. It runs under thirty already, with your highest grade at that—scarcely more than waste. A little more depth, eh? Oh, Lord!"

Less comfort he knew of his own claim. Breaking his back in the cap-rock was abhorrent to his ease. Tench was not of pioneering stuff, and the parasite loves no risks. He might strike the ledge ten feet down, but it might be a thousand. The possible margin of error angered him; whipped his bile to froth. Yet he labored. Without toil, his pretext for complaining was gone.

He labored then. And as he swung his pick and shoveled débris and heaved out the larger stones, the padded rolls of flesh began to slough away. His loose thick skin tightened over firm tissues in which the muscles slipped and slid like wire cables, and the vanity of his youth in his gorilla strength came back with this strength renewed. It was about this time, while looking on Mary when she was flushed from the heat of the stove, that he began wanting Jim's wife as well as Jim's mine.

THEN something disconcerting developed. Every six weeks the teamster from Shale hauled their supplies to the mouth of the ravine and unloaded them into a cache. At their convenience or when the grub outlay fell low, they went down to the cache to replenish. They were in the third month, the supplies had come, and Jim and Mary with Mr. Cairn astride one of the donkeys went down for a first load. In the evening when they came back, Tench noticed that the child still rode the donkey, but perched high, his little brown legs spraddled wide. Between boy and donkey was a bale of empty jute bags. Glowering, Tench asked what they were for.

Jim reddened as if he had been caught writing a poem.

"Going to make a shipment," he confessed a trifle defiantly.

"Shipment—hunh! Shipment of what, for instance?"

"An ore shipment," said Jim, going redder, yet with a poet's shy possessive pride in the sound of the words. "Won't cost much more to let the wagon go back loaded, next time. Yes, I know," he hastened on, "I'll probably get stuck for the reduction charges, and yet again maybe by sorting out only the richest chunks we'll perhaps get a little check—not much o' one, understand—and if we do, we aim to frame it, Mary and me. You see, Sig, Mr. Cairn is up and going on six this minute, and it'll be school for him so this thing of us camping around like kids has got to stop. Yes, sir, this here's our last prospect, and like you say, it's maybe petering out——"

"Maybe?" grumbled Tench.

"Anyway, we're making a shipment, and if we do get a check, then Mary and me, we can say we had a mine and that'll be something. So, far from feeling bad about our desert-rat days, and Mr. Cairn along for a little desert-mouse, we want to remember 'em, Mary and me, and the check framed up will be sort o' official-like. I'm just telling

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you, Sig, so's you can do your horse-laughing now and get it plumb and done with."

Sigel Tench's tight lips twisted to a pitying sneer. He hunched himself about and stalked to his cabin. His feet, as well as arms and neck and head, were bare. He was like some squat, huge, unwieldy beast getting back into its den. He locked himself in, and once there, his face became black, hideous, with contortions of rage. From under the bedclothes on his bunk, reeking with body smells, he produced a vest-pocket memorandum-book and turned to a page of figures. These were the determinations for gold in the picked specimens of Jim's oré.

It was true that the figures were under thirty. Indeed, the highest was but twenty-eight dollars and forty cents. But Tench had neglected to tell Jim that these figures were not based on the ton. That was Sigel Tench's secret. As a matter of cold and stubborn and deadly fact, the ore values in Jim Cairn's granite ledge were not to be measured as running so much to the ton at all. They were past that. They were running so much to the pound. From a wallet hidden in his shuck mattress Tench dumped out nuggets of various sizes—gold nuggets. One was as large as his watch, and it was the retort from a chunk of Jim's ledge no larger than Tench's wide-jawed, narrow-peaked head. Muttering, Tench put back the nuggets. But this was petty thievery, unworthy of Sigel Tench's colossal chagrin.

And now the man he despised was to begin shipping the gold-bearing rock. He morosely visualized what would happen when the first wagon-load reached the chlorination plant at Shale and proved to be twenty-five dollar ore—twenty-five dollars a pound! He saw the rush—the stampede—threading among the mountains. Then Jim Cairn would know that he was a rich man, immediately rich, without need of capital. His dump would pay for development. It was a proposition with not one stroke of dead work.

Tench saw the woman too, girlish yet of figure, not used up. He saw the happiness and pride in her eyes as she would look at the dolt; saw the woman's melting passion for her man. Thought of her was a corrosive agent, edging his grievance. He went and stood at the small square hole that served for window. The door of Jim's cabin was open, and Mary was at the stove, with her collar flaring open from the second button. Directly Jim came and shouted to him to come on to supper.

In a general way Tench knew already what he would do. It hinged on the fact that Jim had not yet patented his claim after doing his assessment work. Should aught happen so that he failed to do this, then some one else could step in and relocate the claim. It was therefore requisite that something happen to Jim before Jim learned that his claim was so well worth patenting.

It must be something, too, that put no hangman's knot under the ear of Sigel Tench. Apart from this, Tench's mental processes were unhampered by scruple. For some time his plot had been forming. Now the particles gathered, took shape, crystallized.

Two days later Jim loaded each of the donkeys with a sack of picked ore, and he and Mary set off down Greasewood Gulch to leave it at the cache until the wagon should come again. They left Mr. Cairn with his Uncle Sig. After a nooning down below through the intensest heat of the day, they would bring back a load of flour, cornmeal, and bacon from the cache.

TENCH did not work on his claim this day. He was hard and fit, and he had no wish to blunt the edge of his strength. But he was painstakingly occupied. Having set Mr. Cairn to building a dam of pebbles down at the shaded spring by his mother's wash-bench, Tench was secure from even that pair of innocent baby eyes. With his pick he scratched a shallow trench not three inches deep from his shack to Jim's cabin, and in this conduit he laid a double length of insulated copper wire, carefully covering it over again and leaving no traces of the operation.

He passed the ends of the wires into Jim's cabin under the bottom log, and inside he connected them up with Jim's twenty-five pound can of black blasting powder, which stood against the wall and was still nearly full. Before going out, he removed the cartridges from Jim's pistol where pistol and belt hung from a peg in an upper log.

The other ends of the wires he introduced into his own shack between two of the stout pine poles forming the walls of the hovel, and laid them in an extension of the conduit in the dirt floor, which crossed the room into

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the dug-out alcove. Here the conduit terminated at his trunk, an old scuffed camel-back that he always kept locked. Through a gimlet hole in the bottom edge of the trunk he inserted the wire-ends; after which he opened the trunk and dumped out a mess of old clothes. He thus uncovered beneath them a varnished box not unlike an instrument-case, but with a T-handle of metal.

Without disturbing the varnished box as it stood in the trunk, he fastened the end of each wire to a threaded brass post in the top of the box and screwed down a thumb nut on each. For a moment his hand caressed the oddly shaped handle in unctuous affection. Then he tossed the old clothes back in and put down the trunk lid, but this time he did not lock the trunk.

Had Tench pulled up on the T-handle, it would have proved to be a rack-bar, and had he then pumped down on it, Jim Cairn's cabin across the way would have risen in air and sprinkled the mountain-slope with its fragments. It was of the essence of Tench's plan that no one knew that he possessed the blasting battery hidden in his trunk.

Years before the battery had fallen to him in settlement of a bad debt; an English younger son come a-prospecting had shed much such equipment before going finally broke and going hence. Tench knew how he would obliterate the box and all such evidence, afterward. He could let Mary herself tell the story; Jim was alone in his cabin. Poor, dear boy, he must have been careless around the powder can.

Tench's activities for the rest of the day were less obvious. He mostly played with Mr. Cairn. Mary had urged him to be sure and see that the child had his usual noon-day nap, but Tench romped with him boisterously at each sign of drowsiness. When at last the shadows down in the ravine were softening to a mantle of velvet and when Tench discerned the figures of the man and woman and two donkeys toiling up the trail, he coaxed the boy into his shack, laid him on the bunk, and stayed with him until he fell asleep.

The parents arrived begrimed and drooping. Jim unslung his pack and unloaded the burros at his cabin door, and followed the burros to their dug-out stable to give them a ration of corn. Mary asked for her boy the first thing, and Tench put a finger to his lips and nodded toward the open door of his shack. Mary's eyes brightened understandingly and she tiptoed inside. She would not awaken the child, but sat and watched him in his sleep.

Tench was still standing in the open doorway of the shack when Jim returned from feeding the donkeys. Jim walked stiffly, and he worked his neck and shoulders to ease the aching cords. Meeting Tench's sardonic scowl, he shook his head humorously at himself as if to say he must be getting old. Then he too asked for the boy.

Tench nodded toward Jim's cabin, but from within the shack Mary called softly:

"Here we are, Jim. He's sleeping to beat the band."

Jim's eyes brightened as Mary's had done, but when he started to enter the shack, Tench shook his head, at the same time reaching behind him and drawing the door partly to. Tench wet his lips first, and then he said:

"Mine! All in there is mine. You can't go in."

He was not disappointed. The blank stupefaction he looked for was there. He would gorge himself on it, and he added:

"No—oh, no—I'm not crazy. I've been aiming some time back to have this woman, that's all."

Mechanically Jim's hand flung to his hip for his pistol, but he did not turn and rush to his cabin for it, as Tench had calculated he would. Instead, he was for going right on through. Tench feigned to step aside, dropping his hands, and kicked up with his knee. As Jim doubled from the blow, Tench pushed Mary back into the shack, pulled shut the door, and latched it. The child, however, had awakened and had contrived to slip out.

Tench considered his enemy. After all, this was the better way. Mary, whose staring and incredulous face was already framed in the little square window, should see her man broken, shamed, unable to keep her for himself. The original plan could wait.

Jim's knees trembled as he tried to get set. The pallor was evident beneath his browned skin, but slowly the drawn, lean features hardened. At that moment Mary called.

"Jim," she cried, "look! Look at the boy! Don't let him——"

Jim glanced down and saw the child's upturned face, frightened and awed by the strange change coming over his father.

"If there's the color of decency in you, Tench," said Jim, "you'll let me put this

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baby in with his mother. I don't want him to see."

Tench cocked his head.

"No," he said, leering, "but I do. I want him to see."

The child's wet-lashed gaze went from one to the other. This trouble among his gods appalled him utterly. But he got one thing clear. The rose-leaf of a mouth quivered; then, serenely confident, he piped forth:

"Daddy—daddy will sure fix you, Uncle Sig."

Jim stooped impulsively to hug him and brush him aside, but Tench was quicker. Tench cuffed the child to the ground and closed in on the father. Mary screamed and turned frantically from the window, seeking a weapon. Of course there was none. The child, white and scared, picked himself up, and Jim saw blood on his cheek. Jim's strength then was not his own. He beat down Tench's blows. He rained blows on Tench's face.

Tench vented a sullen roar as he fought. He was like an enormous, whitish bear with steaming vicious little coal-black eyes. The salty taste on his tongue he knew for his own blood, and it was incredible. Nothing could repay. He launched a blow meant to kill, but it was as if his head were snatched from his shoulders and sent whirling in space. It was not from a blow. His own blow had fallen short, and there was this flash of dazzling blindness. The thing worried him; touched him with a queer, unacknowledged qualm of despair.

But at least the other's blows lacked their first lightning-like impact. Still, this stand-up-and-take warfare was to the advantage of the lighter, quicker, younger man. Tench wanted to punish, but not to chance punishment. Deep down in him something had come to life and was stirring, like a leech fastening on his courage. He needed to pinion those battling arms; then sluggish mass would avail. He could crack bones, twist joints till they snapped. In excruciating pain the victim must scream for mercy.

WHEN next in the act of guarding, Tench weakly dropped his arms. His eyes closed and his head sagged backward, mouth open. His prodigious bulk tottered in limp, sodden collapse. He did not fall, because, in lurching forward, he was caught and held up by his dupe. He laughed, the crimson slobber bubbling between his lips as his arms wrapped 'round his man. Here was joy. He scarcely noticed the shortened hammer-blows over his heart.

But there was a point where taut sinews could strain no harder, and it was not enough. He sensed a sustaining power in his antagonist that he could not account for, as if a tricked fool who fought for loved ones were indomitable. Tench summoned and hurled a last reserve of sheer brute will into the breach, but this time a fine thread seemed to snap in the base of his brain. His head swam in a purpled night flecked with saffron fire. It passed, but he was surer now that it had been an instant of unconsciousness.

Granite clean through he had believed himself, but violent and sustained effort was searching out an erosion, a shifting detritus, at the core. His soul twisted and turned on itself in maddened protest. Due, no doubt, to the element of surprize in the crazed onslaught, Jim Cairn was hurtled upon his back. Astride him and pinning down his wrists, Tench had all the appearance of victor. He brought his battered smear of features close over Jim's face.

"You're beat, Jim! You're beat! Want to quit?"

"Quit?" asked Jim, puzzled and amazed. "What for?"

"I don't want to kill you. We'll call it off. Don't make me——"

He stopped. The prostrate and vanquished one was laughing at him—laughing in scorn and disgust.

"You big slob," said Jim slowly, "you're licked now, and you know it. It's the yellow in you crying quits. Watch out now—I'm going to get up!"

His wiry body buckled up in a manner of compound flop that threw Tench off center. Both struggled together to their feet. Tench's right hand crept under his shirt. From a shoulder scabbard he drew a knife and struck—not once, but twice and a third time.

Then again his head was lifted into space—not purpled space now, but into cosmic night itself. Light returned waveringly, and he could make out his enemy. Jim's right hand was pressed against his left breast, the fingers bent into the armpit. A red flow was spreading over the back of this hand. Tench pointed to it.

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"Your own fault! I—I warned you!"

But Jim was coming toward him, stepping carefully, grotesquely like a tipsy citizen mindful of his navigation. Yet in the man's face, ghastly white under blood and sweat, there was something ordained and very quiet—so very quiet that Tench suddenly put out both hands.

"Jim—Jim!" this Tench pleaded, whined. "Wait—listen to me! You've got it mortal, man. You'll bleed to death. You go to your cabin. Go in there and lie down, and I'll send Mary to you. Word o' honor, Jim! Sacred word o'——"

Jim had stopped in his tracks, and stood there, gently weaving forward and back and blinking at the hand on his breast. Yet Tench dared not close in on him. Tench feared that darkness which hung suspended over his head like a hangman's black cap. Another time, if it fell, it might not lift again. And besides, there was an ominous pain stabbing at his heart.

"That's right, Jim," he spoke, his tone wheedling and crafty and soft. "Go on back to your cabin." He paused as he saw the child run to Jim, and saw Jim's groping left hand come to rest on the slight baby shoulder. "Don't you see, Jim? You owe it to the boy. Go on back now. I'll send Mary."

Jim nodded in a sort of dull comprehension. He turned toward the cabin, still with his hand on the child's shoulder. As Tench watched them, the thrust of his lower lip was like a fish's. Tench saw that he was going to get all he had plotted for, even yet. He'd trick victory out of defeat, out of despair. Why, he was wringing it from death itself.

He would release Mary from the shack. Yes, and he would send her to Jim. He was especially pleased to see that he would be keeping his word. But before Mary might reach Jim and the child in the cabin, he would have that cabin going skyward. Jim and the boy were almost at the cabin now. A little patience only—just a little patience, and then . . . But what was this that Mary was calling from the shack?

"No, Jim—no, no!" she was crying in a voice poignant with horror. "Jim—Jim—you must finish the fight! Do you hear me, dear—you must!"

Tench could see Jim pause and look around and steady himself exactly as a failing man takes hold on a stanchion. When all the world was reeling, that voice steadied him. And it came again, clear, incisive, throbbing with pity, trying so hard to make the dazed man understand. The man's gaze sought to place her as the voice come to him out of the reddish blur. Then the child tugged at his fingers.

"Mama—she say—finish the fight, daddy!"

Tench saw Jim stiffen and his head go up as if the world were clearing; and then Tench saw him coming, a spectral grim figure with fist upraised. Tench braced himself and waited. His fingers were hooked in to take his enemy by the throat. In the imminence of the encounter itself he tensed muscles and sinews. Then pain pierced his heart like a knife-thrust and the black cap fell. He turned blindly, trying to run, and was struck to the ground.

"Comrade! Brother!" he whimpered, groveling.

But now this was Mary's voice again:

"There, there, Jim—it's finished! Come—oh, come, come; let me to you, my poor boy!"

In a murky haze Tench saw a staggering figure reach the door of the shack and lift the latch, and saw Mary take him in her arms. He saw no more, though. Night thickened about him in stifling finality.

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A HANDMADE HERO

by Terry Ramsaye

"LIAR!" And then the fight started. There was a din of voices, a rush of shuffling feet. The mass of struggling men piled up and milled about in front of the scarred walnut bar in the Star of the West.

"Off'n me! Off'n me! Or I'll cave yer head in."

It was the liquor-lit voice of Denis Kearney, six-foot brawler, bully, and privileged character by grace of service to the local powers political.

The lust of battle gleamed from his deep-set eyes and glinted over the hard-cast lines of his old-young face. Denis lunged back and stood clear of the boiling mob, a heavy beer-mug upraised in his big hairy hand. There was a moment's lull. The mighty Denis swept the crowd with a defiant glare.

Somewhere in the tense fringe of threatening gangsters he saw the move of a hand hipward. The beer-mug flashed from his hand, hurtled through a dozen feet of space, floored a man and ricocheted into the long back-bar mirror with an accompanying crash and tinkle of falling glass.

Denis at this convenient moment stepped swiftly out of the side door and into the quiet street.

But the man on the floor was dead.

"Died from wounds inflicted at the hands of one Denis Kearney," the coroner's verdict said.

"Guilty as charged," was the verdict of the Criminal Court. "Twenty-one years in State prison at hard labor," the judge decided.

Thus Denis Kearney went off to prison, with a grin on his face and a sneer in his heart.

Now this might have closed the affair nicely, for a couple of decades at least, had it not been for Billy Hickson and various matters of his immediate concern. Billy, always mentioned in the local paper and never elsewhere as Mr. William I. Hickson, was the subtle, soft-stepping lieutenant and campaign manager for "the boss."

Contrary to the usual rule of his kind the boss chose for himself the laurels of office and a position of high dignity in his domain—which same was the first congressional district of the State. There were two important instrumentalities which maintained Dan Wayne in his bossdom and his seat in Congress, firstly his paper the *Times*, and lastly his man Friday, the aforesaid Mr. William—Billy Hickson.

Many were the things under the sun that needs must be done for the boss. There were not a few of these that one can not do and yet be a congressman and publisher. To do these things and to secure the doing of them was the mission of Billy Hickson. Some of these affairs pertained to the polling of a couple of hundred or so votes from carefully colonized lodging-houses, the

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proper delivery of a round and safe majority from the river wards and such items.

Mr. Hickson had attained his confidential status by the force of a frequently demonstrated ability to induce large numbers of freeholders and qualified electors to deposit the right ballot—in consideration of love and affection and one dollar in hand paid, along with the concomitant tobacco and liquor.

While this may all be thus euphemistically described in words, in plain deeds it called for considerable rough labor. That was where bloomed the genius of Denis Kearney. If Billy Hickson was Congressman Dan Wayne's man Friday, then Denis Kearney was Hickson's Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Denis was handier at election time than a preacher's wife at a strawberry festival. Denis could talk fast, hit hard and keep at it, drinking amply the while.

So the putting away of Mr. Denis Kearney at the State prison half a dozen miles down the river came most inopportunely. A campaign was due in the Fall and there was promise of trouble aplenty from up-State reform influences. The governorship and the whole State administration had gone over to the reform crowd and also to perdition absolute, in the opinion of Billy Hickson. The capital was determined to clean up the State, whereas if the first congressional district were to be cleaned up there would be no liquor, no license and no job for the boss, for Billy Hickson, or for Denis.

What Billy was in spirit to the first district, Denis Kearney was in physical embodiment to the river wards of the town.

It promised to be the hardest election fight in the history of Dan Wayne's career, and Hickson recognized the situation. He wanted Kearney, wanted him sorely.

A less stubborn man than Hickson would have cast about for a successor to the husky Kearney. Hickson, however, could think of nothing more expedient than the liberation of his strong-armed assistant. Now there were many things in the way. A man in prison for murder, a rather unnecessary, unprovoked, saloon murder, is not much of a text in a plea for executive clemency from a prohibition governor.

But Hickson knew in July that November was on the way, with all of November's strenuous work to do. Someway the thing must be done. Someway, he decided, Kearney must be liberated for duty at the polls.

In the dusty, paper-strewn room over the office of the *Times*, where Hickson officed, there were long spells of cogitation, wherein Hickson denied himself to visitors and burned in solitude large numbers of stogies as incense to a perplexed soul. Out of this gestation was born a thought.

HICKSON presented himself to the publisher congressman with a plea.

"Dan, I've doped out a way to get Denis Kearney out of prison," Hickson announced, "and all I want is plenty of space in the paper when I need it and a few days of the time of Miss Merlin."

Miss Merlin was, it may be explained, a member of the staff of the *Times*, a sob-sister, which in the vernacular of the newspaper craft means a girl reporter person presumed to be especially gifted in writing of matters of sympathy and heart interest. She did all of the stories about kittens rescued by firemen and the annual pathos of the Christmas dinner at the orphans' home. She was homely and little and poor and believed in herself. She also believed in other people as well, which has some bearing on the affairs with which we are concerned.

"O.K., Billy," and a wave of his hand, one of those characteristically sweeping, gracefully generous the-world-is-yours-as-my-gift kind of waves, from Dan Wayne summed up that pleasant gentleman's attention to the tentatively presented demands of his Billy Hickson.

Hickson walked out briskly as one with business to do and on his way to do it. He did not linger to elaborate. Experience had taught him long before that Dan Wayne did not care for details, particularly if those details should be of strenuous character. To Dan Wayne, genial congressman, results were more pleasant than methods. Hickson supplied the methods. Wayne enjoyed the results. Kearney was one of the methods.

The movements of Hickson for the ensuing week might have been followed with considerable curiosity. One of his frequent paths led into the front door of a grocer's shop a few squares away from his office. A careful observer would have gathered in time that the significance of the grocer's

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shop was in its adjacency to the celebrated Star of the West. There was a certain latent Puritanism in Billy Hickson which stood between him and the front door of a saloon. This explains the curious fact that while Hickson often passed into the grocery, and as often passed out again, hours later, he was never seen carrying a package.

A number of conferences took place in a dim back room just off the alley door of the Star of the West. In that sheltered cubicle was a table, surrounded by a quartette of chairs. On the wall in easy reach was a button. Ranged about were pictures of sparely dressed ladies of the stage, various famed race-horses, prize-fighters in two colors, a bulldog and a number of billiard champions. In short, this was a regular back room. Also it was the "office" of the Star of the West, and the working headquarters of those engaged in the handling of affairs in the river wards of the city.

Into this retreat one late afternoon wandered Quin McGovern, still bearing traces of the grime of the engine cab. He seated himself at the table, dividing his attention between a tall glass mug and a spread of cards in that fascinating layout of solitaire known as Canfield. He looked up, still automatically counting off the cards as Hickson stepped into the room and closed the door.

"Hello, Billy! How's tricks?"

Hickson slipped into a chair alongside the burly engineer, and reached out, pressing the wall button.

The formalities of the drink concluded, McGovern with his beer and Hickson with his ginger ale, sat in conference.

Quin McGovern held the throttle on the M. K. & W. Limited, the crack train of the division. Also he held the invisible scepter of control over the rail workers and was one of the minor powers of the Wayne machine.

"It's about Denny Kearney," Hickson announced, drawing his chair up close and pushing the solitaire deck back from the sector of table between them. "We want him out in time for the election. We have got to have every good worker out this time. There's lots doing."

Hickson's voice went lower as he dwelt earnestly on his purpose and methods.

With a forefinger wet from his glass he drew a map on the table in front of McGovern.

"The prison's six miles below us, here," Hickson emphasized, "and the tracks run along between it and the river like this, with a sharp turn toward the bluff, like this—don't they?" he continued with a glance toward McGovern for confirmation. "Then the pumping-station of the prison would be about here, half a mile up the river from the prison right at the curve."

Hickson dotted the location on his finger-mark map.

"Yep, that's the lay of the land," McGovern assented.

"Well, now Kearney is a trusty and they've put him outside the walls up at the pumping-plant firing boilers," continued Hickson, with a grin, "that being their idea of a reward for good behavior."

Then the conversation subsided to whispers. Presently McGovern resumed his solitaire and Hickson passed out by way of the alley door and the grocer's shop.

Hickson's next move was a trolley trip to the State prison. There was a low-spoken conversation with convict No. 9989, in civil life Denis Kearney; this conversation being conducted on the shady side of the pumping-station with that careless and distant attention on the part of the guard in charge which the semi-official status of the visitor, Mr. William I. Hickson, seemed to indicate as etiquette for the occasion.

Hickson stopped in at the local room of the *Times* on his return to the city. A hard-driven fast-working young man with a "desk hump" and a green eye-shade occupied the desk of command.

"Say, Morgan, I just met Congressman Wayne," was Hickson's greeting. "He said to tell you to be sure to send a reporter to cover the Sunday-school excursion to the State prison on the sixteenth of this month. He mentioned Miss Merlin, so I guess he wants her to write it up. We've got to play to the reform crowd these days."

Hickson lingered and leaned over the desk to watch the entry made in the assignment-book. Under date of July 16 was written:

Miss Merlin — cover up-State Sunday-school Association excursion and picnic at State prison. Meet special excursion train on M. K. W. at Union Station, 2 P.M., and ride to prison with them.

WHEN Helen Merlin stepped on the banner-bedecked Sunday-school-excursion special that day Billy Hickson was standing a discreet half a block away in the train sheds, a folded

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newspaper in his hand. With a movement intended to appear casual he waved the paper semaphore-like. Engineer McGovern waved back and swung up into the cab.

Hickson walked toward his office slowly, pausing twice to consult his watch. The train was due at the State prison at 2:30 o'clock.

It was just 2:30 when Hickson strolled into the local room of the *Times* and took a seat close to the desk where the city editor was engaged, watching that young man's movements with a particular attentiveness.

Hickson looked up with a suppressed start when the telephone splashed out a sharp, peremptory ring. The city editor snapped up the instrument.

"Yes—Miss Merlin—put her up. Yes, I get you. Go ahead."

Hickson was tensed in his chair, his eyes focussed on the telephone as though in the hope that they might discover for him the words with which the receiver was vibrating.

"Yes, yes," the city editor shouted into the telephone, "come on in and write it—great story—hurry up."

"What's doing?" demanded Hickson in a tone intended to be colorless.

"Another one of your live tips, Billy," responded the editor. "That special assignment, Sunday-school convention, you remember. They had a near wreck. Hero convict discovers broken rail at the curve on the river bluff, near prison pumphouse. Dashes up track to flag train loaded with Sunday-school children—stumbles and gets bumped by train just as engineer applies air-brakes in nick of time—stopped on the brink of disaster—noble convict hero picked up, revived, etc. A grand yarn for page one, column one—our hero being none other than your old friend and able statesman, Denis Kearney."

What Morgan, the young city editor, thought or didn't think about the merits of the situation did not matter to Hickson just then. He shortly passed through the grocery entrance to the Star of the West's back room and forthwith took two ginger ales in rapid succession.

Miss Merlin flounced into the office of the *Times* much aflutter and threw herself at her typewriter.

"Let the copy flow in full and abundantly, Helen," the city editor ordered, giving his eye-shade a hitch upward and smiling. "I forecast this story will find favor with our 'higher ups.'"

Miss Merlin needed no special bidding. Her heart was full of the heroism of No. 9989. Two hours later she approached the city editor's desk.

"There it is, about two columns. I guess I'll go out and eat," she said, handing over a pile of typed sheets.

Miss Merlin stood waiting, as the editor skimmed through her story. He looked up and discovered her there, lips trembling and eyes wet.

"It's a regular story, Mr. Morgan," she gulped. "I'm silly to cry over it, but you see I was there—kind of upset, I suppose."

"Yes, yes, Helen, go ahead and get your dinner. Needn't come back tonight. I'll need you to handle the following story on this tomorrow. I've a hunch we'll have a lot of this for a while."

DOWN at the State prison hospital a kindly guard handed a copy of the *Times* to No. 9989 the following morning. No. 9989, otherwise Denis Kearney, considerably bandaged about the head, arm in sling, perused the front page of that journal with exceeding interest and pleasure.

CONVICT KEARNEY SAVES LIVES OF 500 CHILDREN.

With that bold line across the page the recital started, embellished with interviews with everybody from the president of the State Sunday-school Association to Quin McGovern, engineer of the excursion special.

Kearney was restless with the unaccustomed comfort of a hospital bed when in the afternoon the guard-nurse came in to announce, "A reporter to see you, '89," and smoothed the covers to make the scene presentable.

Helen Merlin, escorted by a deputy warden, entered and sat by the bed.

"I'm from the *Times*," she said, "I was on the train yesterday, and now I want you to tell me all about how it happened."

She smiled encouragingly.

The convict, with unfeigned embarrassment, blushed and stammered.

"I ain't got nothin' to say; lady, I can't do no talking for the papers."

Helen's article in the next day's *Times* dwelt much on the self-effacing modesty of "Hero" Kearney and his refusal to claim any credit in the affair.

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It is incidental to remark that this article was read with the most unseemly mirth by a gathering consisting of William I. Hickson and Quin McGovern in the back room of the Star of the West.

"You're some stage-manager, Billy." McGovern's vast bulk tossed in billows of laughter until tears oozed from his eyes. "Push the button again."

"Getting down to business," Hickson interrupted, "here's a nice, yellow twenty-case note for the section-boss who selected and placed that very excellent broken rail where it would do the most good. He's the real hero of this show."

Helen Merlin's enthusiasm over her view of the heroism of No. 9989 was contagious. Her articles brought floods of letters to the paper and flowers to Kearney in prison. Presently the up-State club-women passed resolutions of praise. The Sunday-school papers printed Kearney's picture and an article on heroism and self-sacrifice for the guidance of the young. At this delicate moment a neat and tasty editorial appeared in the *Times* suggesting a pardon for Kearney. There were several phrases in this editorial which might have suggested the simple, direct style of William I. Hickson.

The governor, judging shrewdly the sweep of public emotion, did the proper thing at the proper moment. With due dramatic flourish and much attention in the press he presented Denis Kearney with a pardon and his liberty on the alleged birthday.

THREE days passed and Kearney, summoned to "headquarters," stood before Billy Hickson. There was a regretful, almost scared look on his prison-blanched face. He choked up.

"I am sorry, Billy. I'm awful sorry—but I can't do this stuff for you any more—I—I just can't do it."

"Why, why, why!" Hickson spluttered in excited staccato. "You're not throwing me down are you?"

"Nix, Billy, nix—don't put it that way. It's like this. This here hero stuff in the papers and all that swell stuff that little Merlin girl done for me, believin' in me and all that—it's got my goat. That is what got me out of prison and I ain't going to make any more of a liar out of the girl that did it. I've got to try to make it square. See?

"I'm making a little talk at Half-Roads Mission tonight—she's wrote out for me just what I want to say. Come and hear me—get me right."

LADY LOVE

BY CHARLES C. JONES

SHE'S a fat and fussy party, with her bonnet on her ear,
And a sort of "come-and-get-you" manner, too;
And she's got a brand of language that'll blue the atmosphere
When she waddles out to hand 'em 'round a few.

She's a crusty, busty lulu, when she's going on a spree,
And at buttin' in she's surely up to snuff;
For she knows her mind, and gettin' where she thinks she'd like to be
Is her little way of treatin' people rough.

So she lurches into craters, heels a-wavin', going strong,
But comes up again and twice as full of fight;
And she walks right into houses and she brings the walls along;
And in all respects her conduct is a fright.

Oh, she rumbles, and she grumbles, and she just will have her whirl—
Sets and argues, spittin' fire and brimstone rank.
But you ask the man who knows her if he'll tell you who's his girl,
And the whole blamed crew will chorus "Missus Tank!"

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THE DANCE OF THE GOLDEN GODS

A four part story by Stephen Chalmers Part III.

Author of "The Admiral of the Line," Chaplain to the Buccaneers," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form

YOUNG Dickon Butshead stood in the back room of his uncle's goldsmith shop in Rat Lane and watched the wily old assayer take from the hands of his richly dressed patron some small pieces of gold and examine them closely.

"You say, Sir Walter," spoke the goldsmith, "that the other assayers all made a similar assay, reporting the same high bearing, and then all discovered a similar error at the same time, showing the ore worthless?"

"Even so," replied Raleigh bitterly. "I have mine enemies, who would show that I never reached the Guianas. Even have they bribed some of my crew to say that the gold came from Barbary."

Dickon, whose face was yet bronzed from his voyage as cabin-boy to Sir Walter on the *Whelp*, stepped forward eagerly.

"Here is one they can not bribe, Sir Walter," he cried.

But the lad's outburst won from the gentleman only a haughty stare.

The slight wounded Dickon's loyal heart sorely. All his love for his former master he felt turn to bitterness.

When Raleigh had gone, leaving his ore to be assayed, a sailor came furtively into the shop. "Bulkhead" Gorges had sailed on the *Whelp;* had been soundly flogged there for mutiny, in fact. And concerning the voyage he whispered a long time in the ear of Master Simons, the goldsmith.

"Give me but a ship with master and crew," he finished hoarsely. "I know where the mine is. Thou and I can be rich as the Khan of Tartary."

"But they said 'twas no true gold Raleigh brought back," reminded Simons.

"Trickery. They wish him to lose favor with the queen, that they may sail another expedition before him."

"Think you, then, there are those who would back such a venture?" asked Simons with a gleam in his eye.

"Aye," said Gorges, and the two whispered on.

ONE night there was a strange gathering in the back room of the shop in Rat Lane. Some were there who wished to see Raleigh in royal disfavor, and all lusted for the gold he had discovered. Much talk went on in low voices. Butshead read aloud from an old parchment the story of Juan Martinez, who had gone to the New World and found a golden city there. Then more talk, until all were agreed to hazard a secret expedition and purses were loosed to buy a ship.

Dickon Butshead, who had the story of Juan Martinez by heart, was to be mate, a rum-soaked navigator named Barbary was chosen captain, and Bulkhead Gorges was to find the crew.

Simons felt that Dickon's loyalty to his former master had been killed by Raleigh's cold words and haughty stare.

Forthwith, in accordance with the plot, Dickon was sent to tell Sir Walter that his ingots were but fool's gold. He found the knight in his lodgings with Taruma, a young Indian prince brought back rom the New World.

Curtly the lad said that the ore was worthless. Raleigh bowed his head.

"Dickon lad, mine enemies have beaten me," he said brokenly.

The grief of his old master was too much for the boy. He thrilled again with loyalty.

"They have not!" he cried, and told the whole story of the plotting. "But I sail with them," he finished, "and I shall fetch proof that Sir Walter Raleigh is no dreamer."

"Go then, lad," said Raleigh, "and God be with you."

ON THE tenth day of January, 1596, a ship called the *Fearless* put out to sea, carrying a nondescript crew lorded over by Bulkhead Gorges, Dickon Butshead as mate, and Captain Barbary, who was dead drunk.

On the fourth day out a stowaway was discovered. It was Taruma.

"Me sick inside for go home," he explained brokenly.

However, Butshead knew that Raleigh had sent him.

They sailed on. Gorges ruled the crew, showing openly his contempt for the drunken captain and the youthful mate, but avoiding—with the common sense that was not wanting in his make-up—any

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clash that might bring serious harm to the venture. Barbary, when he was sober, taught Dickon navigation. But he drank more and more. Then in a frantic clutch at his departing self-respect he denied his craving and abstained totally. Dickon found him one day singing softly to himself. The shock had been too great. Barbary had gone mad, and the ship was without a navigator.

Butshead told Gorges.

"No matter," said the sailor cooly. "We'll steer her by dead reckoning. No turning back now. Steady as she goes. We'll make land somewhere, as did the Italian, an happen it be not nigh our goal, we ha' the ship and all that's in her, which I choose against scurvy England and a pauper's fare!"

Dickon said nothing. He had little heart for venturing on without a navigator into the uncharted Atlantic; nor did he care to become an unwilling guest aboard a stolen ship, his original object in coming aboard defeated. He resolved to seize the first opportunity to head the ship for the nearest land. Some of the crew wished the same thing. Conspicuous among these was a long-headed Scot named Fergus. Him the young mate found at the wheel that night.

"The wind serves good for the Cape Verde Islands to the south," said Butshead. "Make her due south, then, and steady at that."

With a grunt Fergus obeyed.

IT WAS not long next morning before Bulkhead Gorges learned the altered course of the ship. He ordered Butshead imprisoned in the cabin with Barbary.

"What? With a madman?" asked Dickon.

"Not an thou dost thy bit o' sarvice," said the boatswain. "An thou be anxious to win back to England, do thy best to bring the ship to Trinidad."

So they turned again westward, and each day Dickon shot the sun and figured as best he could the position of the ship.

Taruma, who was skilled in Indian methods of healing, had taken Barbary under his care. When they reached Trinidad the captain was well and sane.

Don Antonio de Berreo, Spanish governor of Trinidad, held no love for the English. Yet he greeted cordially the landing-party from the *Fearless* and invited them in to taste a certain royal brew. Dickon Butshead had just put the cup to his lips when an arrow flew through the window and pierced the governor's heart. As at a signal, all the pent-up race hatred broke loose, and a fight started which lasted until Barbary came to the rescue with eight men from the *Fearless*.

On deck Barbary counted his crew.

"Where's Butshead and Fergus and Taruma?" he asked. "We must rescue the lads."

But Gorges refused to go back for them.

AFTER some days the *Fearless* set out on the ascent of the Orinoco. As the ship moved up the channel a war-party of Macuregai Indians put out to the attack. But before an arrow was shot there came up-stream a strange *canoa*, in the bow of which stood an Indian whose arm was lifted in a sign of command. The Macuregai gave a great shout.

"By gorry!" gasped Gorges. "It's Taruma!"

With Taruma were Fergus and Butshead. Quickly the three came aboard, while from the shore hastened the king of the Macuregai to pay tribute to the prince of the Orenoqueponi.

Taruma had gone ashore at Trinidad and mingled with the natives, from whom he learned that Don Antonio plotted to poison the Englishmen. Taruma himself had shot the governor, and, after the fight, with the aid of Fergus, had rescued Butshead, who had been overcome by his meager swallow of the poison drink. Disguised as Indians, the white men had traveled with the young prince to the river bank, whence some natives had taken them to the *Fearless*. Taruma now explained to the Macuregai that the strangers were not the hated Spaniards, but his own friends and allies.

THE Indians were glad to make peace, for they were about to celebrate the advent of a curious festival. On a certain island in the river lived a tribe of women warriors. No men were allowed to come near them except during a period called the Love Moon, when the Macuregai paid them a yearly visit. Now the Macuregai proposed that a party of the white men accompany them to witness the ceremonies which opened the festival. The white men were not to land.

But at the island the women insisted upon seeing the fair-faced strangers, and when the time came for choosing mates the savages were ignored and the whites were chosen to a man. Finally one of the women selected a handsome Indian. He stood silent for a moment and then turned and thrust his spear through one of Gorges' men. The Englishmen fought their way to the boats. Five minutes later they were half a mile from the island, with no one to guide them back to Captain Barbary and the *Fearless*.

CHAPTER XIV

THE DEADLY RIVER

ABOUT daybreak, Taruma, who had guided the boats in silence all the night, brought the adventurers out upon a swift-flowing river which he said was the same they had left a little above Macuregai. Here, in the lesser rapids of the inshore waters, Gorges called a halt for a brief conference. The participants in this were the mutineer himself, the mate Butshead and the young Prince of Aromaia.

Taruma had little to say. He seemed depressed, deeply troubled and facing some problem of which he did not speak. Butshead, on the other hand, awoke from a kind of fierce reverie and was voluble enough. His thoughts for several hours had been with Captain Barbary and the nine men on the ship at the village of Macuregai.

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"What I say—if what I say has any weight," said he bitterly, "is that we turn about now that we are back in the river and, traveling with the current, get back aboard the *Fearless* before the news of last night's insult to the customs of a people results in the seizure of our ship and the wiping out of the captain and our comrades."

"Bah!" said Gorges with open contempt. "What wouldst thou, youngster? We're half-way to the gold and we'll chance the ship. What's the ship to us without the gold?"

"What's the gold without the ship, to say nothing of loyalty to our mates!" retorted Butshead.

"Much loyalty Barbary showed thee," sneered Gorges with a faint wink at his comrades, "when he left thee to sink or swim at Trinidad. Besides, Caribana and his men are at Carraori to stay for a month. What's to hinder us getting the gold and being back aboard the ship to help Barbary give the old savage a warm reception if he has blood in his eye?"

"It sounded like a month of peace and love when we hurried away last night," was Butshead's sarcasm. "Methinks Caribana and his warriors may even now be on the way down the river. What say you, Taruma?"

Taruma lifted heavy eyes and shook his head sadly.

"No can tell. Never before this happen. Since white man gone may make peace and stay as all before time. Maybe no. Maybe go back with inside place full of hate. Taruma sick and full of sad. Like this: Caribana maybe send word to my uncle, King of Aromaia. Say white men break law of Orenoqueponi and Aterima women people defy name of Topiawari, and Caribana say to Topiawari, 'You come send help me punish white man and Aterima people, too!' Taruma no know. Place inside him very much trouble."

"There!" said Butshead. "I had given no thought to that, which makes matters the worse. As being here in place of Captain Barbary, I give order that the boats go down-stream to reach the ship and warn and help Barbary against his peril."

"Aye, aye," said Gorges coolly, "but 'tis the first I ha' heard thou wert here to give orders. And it has been growin' on me for some time, my cabin-boy-mate, that 'tis thou since we left Plymouth as has spoke the word every time of turning back. 'Twas thou as put the ship about, in league wi' that thistle-mouthed Scot, without a word to any of us, and would ha' made Cape Verde. Think not for an instant, lad, that we ha' forgot who was Raleigh's favorite and spy and telltale aboard the *Whelp*.

"By the Lord Harry! It comes on me times thou art on this voyage as a traitor to lead us astray or telltale our doing to that popinjay, Raleigh, that no doubt thou didst talk with afore thou left London Town. An' more," he added with a triumphant jeer, "it did not escape my eye that thou wert main friendly with this blackamoor Taruma who come aboard at Plymouth and stowed away suspicious-like."

Butshead answered coolly, while Fergus' blue eyes narrowed and Taruma looked up with a tigerish glare:

"I be one against twelve at least. An ye propose to toss me overboard to feed the *lagartos*, ye may even do it. But an ye do, ye make an enemy of the blackamoor who has saved ye time and again, and ye will find spears and no liquor to welcome ye at Morequito. Besides, an Juan Martinez spoke truth to the monk at San Juan, ye will have destroyed the unwritten chart that will take ye straight to El Dorado."

Gorges thought hard for a minute and Fergus observed that his crony, Scroop, gave him a gentle nudge.

"Lord ha' mercy!" Gorges suddenly exclaimed with almost comical gravity. "It I ha' any thought of feedin' thee to the crocodiles, 'tis thyself put the matter in words. 'Tis not as bad as that, Dickon, but we be poor men and we serve some masters in which is numbered thine own uncle, Master Simons of Rat Lane. How should we explain to them we won so far and turned back? I put it to the other lads."

He turned suddenly to the rest of the company and cried—

"Who's for turning back?"

Only Butshead and Fergus answered—

"Aye!"

At the next question "Who's for the gold?" twelve lusty voices roared out:

"Let's go ahead! The gold! No turning back!"

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"That settles it!" said Gorges, adding with a grin, "'Tis main curious how hard it is to find a captain for this crew."

Then, to add point to the remark, at which the two boats' crews laughed outright, he gave the word for resumption of the course, looking hard at Taruma the while. The Indian merely pointed south by a little west and lapsed into a kind of lassitude.

Added to the fact that Taruma's heart yearned to the home which was less than one hundred and seventy leagues distant, the young prince saw, as Butshead and Fergus did, that it would avail nothing to oppose these men in their mad determination to reach and possess themselves of gold enough to build them houses of the metal, could they carry it away. Possibly, also, Taruma had some thought in his mind which would not prove to the advantage of Gorges and his followers.

The events of the next eleven days would make interesting reading as a diary of travel in strange places, but they have no place here save as they resulted in a swifter voyage to Morequito than Raleigh made. The casualties, however, were much the same.

When Raleigh made the voyage up the river to the main stream of the Orinoco—a distance of about three hundred miles from Puerto de los Españoles—he had to feel his way. Many days were lost in blind alleys of the delta and in avoiding rapids and swift currents which often held, if it did not completely turn, them back long distances. In the present instance, under the accurate guidance of Taruma, all such delays and setbacks were avoided, the boats traveling by the shortest line of least resistance.

Raleigh's voyage from Caribana's town to Topiawari's consumed twenty days, that of Gorges and Butshead only thirteen, about two from Macuregai to Carraori and eleven from the isle of women to Morequito.

But the discomforts and fatalities were no less. For the first few nights they drew the boats close into the green walls of the bank of the river and camped in the jungle. But a few nights of this were enough for the hardiest, except—oddly enough—Butshead and Fergus, and—not so oddly—the Indian, Taruma.

GORGES and his men suffered from something which might be termed "jungle terror." To their untutored fancy the midnight tangle was full of sounds that were unearthly. The half-shriek, half-roar of the jaguar stirred them out of sleep with only a half-consciousness of the terror that had burst upon their dreams. In the wakeful hours they heard strange rustlings and slitherings in the underbrush, and sometimes glowing eyes regarded them steadily, disappeared and reappeared at some other point of the camp circle.

They appointed one of their number to remain awake on watch and to keep the fire burning brightly. This only made matters worse, for the mosquitoes and a thousand other strange crawling, creeping and flying things were attracted by the glare. On the second and third days most of the men, and particularly Gorges, were strange objects to behold, their faces and necks, arms and hands, bloated, spotted and discolored, as if every bit of exposed flesh had been poisoned in the night.

Only Fergus and Butshead of the whites and Taruma the Indian seemed quite immune, which roused the spite of Gorges to a higher degree. The blue eyes of the Scot would twinkle with a kind of inhuman delight when of a morning he came upon Scroop, for instance, with a face more like a piece of raw pork than anything else and a pair of little holes with the flesh puffed out and closing in around where his eyes should have been.

The fact that Fergus and Butshead suffered little or no inconvenience aroused the suspicion of Gorges that Taruma had something to do with it. Taruma, when accused, smiled and said:

"Animal-beast that fly night like good men. No touch fool people or baby."

As a matter of fact, every evening when the boats were beached Taruma, strolling about the jungle while the fire was being built, gathered a number of leaves from a particular tree. Some of these he slipped to Butshead and Fergus, who, when sure they were unobserved, bruised them with their hands and rubbed the slight moisture of juice on the exposed parts of their bodies. The gnats might buzz and whine about them, but when one had the temerity to alight it promptly departed.

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Besides the torture of the gnats and the terrors of the jungle camp, the boats were twice attacked while forging up-stream in the daytime. Whence came the attack was never evident. The first time Gorges and his men only knew that a shower of small darts fell into one of the boats. One of the darts glanced off Gorges' pistol-butt. Another stuck in Butshead's hat. Taruma very deliberately plucked it out and threw it overboard, at the same time giving the command for the boats to work farther out into the stream.

Fortunately the boats had been rather farther than usual from the bank when the attack came and the darts were too spent to penetrate much. Taruma scanned the bank very keenly, but saw no sign of life. It was different next time.

But between the first and second arrow attacks there happened something that put the fear of death upon the adventurers and ended the custom of camping in the jungle.

They made camp as usual that evening. While the fire was being built and some provisions cooked, Gorges sent a weakling named Grimes—who had been his hand-servant and boot-slave since the beginning of the voyage—to see if he could find a spring, the water of the river being warm, muddied and tainted with decayed vegetation.

Grimes did not return when the water was needed and Gorges sent Scroop to find out what had become of him. Ten minutes later Scroop came rushing back into the camp, his swollen face livid and his speech almost inarticulate. He could only point in the direction Grimes had gone and then fell down upon the ground, shivering, wiping imaginary things from his face and clawing at his hair.

Gorges was for breaking camp at once and returning to the boats, but Butshead rallied the men, asking if they would again desert a comrade who might be saved. Fergus supported him, as did Taruma, and Gorges, fearing for his popularity perhaps, agreed to advance cautiously and find out what had happened to Grimes and so terrified Scroops.

Most of the men followed, fearing to be left in a minority in camp. They stealthily made their way through the jungle, following the trail of Grimes and Scroop which Taruma had easily picked up.

They discovered Grimes. The poor weakling had found a good spring and had apparently been filling a bucket with water when the thing descended upon him. There he lay with the bucket still in his hand, but around it and his whole body were wound, fold upon fold, the coils of a huge snake.

Most of the men at once took to their heels. Gorges would have followed but was shamed into a stand by Butshead and Fergus, who looked to Taruma. The Indian crawled forward on his hands and knees to have a closer view. Presently he crawled back, stood up and made a gesture of finality with his two hands.

"He very dead," said he simply. "Serpent strike with tongue first, then break he up. Soon he eat white man whole and go asleep."

"What say we kill the brute?" said Gorges in a sudden access of rage, possibly at the loss of his hand-servant and boot-slave.

"No good," said Taruma. "No bring white man back. Take plenty men kill serpent so big and no light to see make sure. Maybe serpent get mad feeling inside place and kill some more."

That satisfied Gorges. They returned to the camp where they found the whole company getting into the boats, to which Scroop had led the way. One of the men who had accompanied the investigating party was violently sick and the others were shivering as with ague. That night, and every night thereafter until they reached Morequito, was spent in the boats.

It was on the following day that the second attack of *aroras*, or poisoned arrows, occurred. Again the attackers were quite invisible, but this time the darts did not fall harmlessly. One man who gloried in the name of Onions was struck in the cheek, where the small arrow remained quivering for a few seconds before Onions himself plucked it out.

The wound was but a slight puncture and the man made light of it. Taruma proposed that the boats put ashore on the opposite bank, offering to doctor the wound before it was too late. But Gorges would have none of it and Onions himself was ashamed to make a fuss about what seemed a small matter.

Taruma bowed, but presently stood up in the boat and, cupping his hands to his mouth, shrilled forth a cry in a strange language. All eyes watched the river bank

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but no human being appeared there. Yet the cry came back like an echo. Then there was silence.

Taruma sat down with a quiet smile and said to Butshead—

"Now, my people of Aromaia soon know Taruma come, and no more *aroras* trouble us."

Half an hour later the man Onions keeled over at his oar in some sort of a fit. Taruma said he could do nothing for him. It was too late. Onions died in the middle of the following night, his body terribly swollen and his face black. During his last hours he incessantly cried for water, prodigious quantities of which he drank.

On the eighth day from Carraori the river upon which the adventurers were traveling opened out into a great stream which must have been about twelve miles wide at that point. It was the Orinoco above the delta. It ran due west and east. For the next three days travel was pleasant and easy, the boats keeping clear of the central current, which ran from west to east, and taking advantage of a wind which blew them on their course from east to west.

Finally, on the eleventh day, Taruma arose and hailed with a long-drawn cry a considerable native town which stood in a sheltered bay. It was Morequito. To it came, out of the original eighteen who left the *Fearless* at Macuregai, precisely twelve men.

Taruma's hail was presently answered by a sudden outpouring of warriors old and young from the thatched houses. They lined up on the beach and began a low dismal chant which brought a cloud to Taruma's face.

Butshead hardly noticed this, however, in his delight at descrying in the land group the figures of two white men. Sparrow and Godwin, Raleigh's hostages for Taruma, was there and alive.

As the sad chant rose and fell Taruma urged the rowers of the boats to greater speed. He seemed all eagerness to set foot on his ancestral soil; yet there was no gladness in his face. As the boats neared it was apparent that some word had forerun the boats of Taruma's coming, for the front line of the Indians was composed of elder chiefs in full ceremonial raiment.

When the boats were within five or six yards of grounding Taruma sprang overboard and rushed to the shore. The elder chiefs bowed and laid their spears at his feet. Taruma stood stock-still and his head, too, sank to his breast in a manner that was suggestive of great grief.

The moment the boats beached Butshead sprang ashore and rushed toward the two white men, who were attired half in Indian clothes, the rest being remnants of their English habiliments.

"Sparrow! Godwin!" he cried joyously.

"Young Butshead!" both exclaimed together. "Eh, lad, 'tis good to see an English face. But ye come at a sad time. Old Topiawari is dead. Young Taruma is king in Aromaia and overlord of all the Orenoqueponi!"

CHAPTER XV

THE WHIRLWIND SOWN

IT WAS both a good and a bad time for the adventurers to have arrived at Morequito. Topiawari, the aged king of Aromaia, had died but a few hours before, but with the satisfaction of knowing, from the word brought by runners through the jungle, that his nephew and heir, Taruma, was coming up the river in company with a number of white men, presumably Capuaralli—Walter Raleigh—and other subjects of the great empress, Ezrabeta.

Taruma's grief was great that he had not arrived in time to be recognized by the dimming eyes of the old king. Only a few hours. Had the white men not committed that supreme folly at Carraori it would have been otherwise. In that hour he felt a great bitterness against the white men, except Barasai and the Scot; a desire to hinder rather than help them further.

For the present he only gave orders that they be treated with all courtesy and comfortably lodged, after which he went to the house in which Topiawari lay surrounded by mourning chiefs, and himself remained long in tribute to the dead.

The tribe's loss at this time gave the white men an opportunity to rest and to hold council together. There was greater assurance of safety in the fact that Taruma was now lord supreme of the Aromaia. Gorges considered the death of old Topiawari a bit of unexpected luck.

Further luck lay in the discovery that Sparrow and Godwin were alive and well,

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showing that the tribe was still well disposed to Raleigh and the English. Gorges was determined that it would not be his fault if the Aromaia discovered that all Englishmen were not Raleigh's men.

After he and his men had been lodged in various native huts, Gorges was eager first of all to come to speech with Sparrow, the penman, and Godwin, the map-maker, the two hostages left by Raleigh. But when he went to look for these men he was unable to find them. He learned by questioning with broken words and signs that Barasai and Fergus had been lodged with the white hostages.

Apparently Butshead, for some reason of his own, had stolen a march on Gorges, or possibly the penman and the map-maker had spirited him and the Scot away for a quiet preliminary talk, for it should be remembered that the arrival of the white men without Raleigh and with a rascal, as they knew Gorges to be, in apparent command, was something of a mystery to them.

As a matter of fact, Sparrow and Godwin had been suspicious from the moment they heard that Raleigh was in England and that young Butshead was mate of the *Fearless* but his authority quite overruled or ignored by Gorges. The latter's record as a trouble-maker aboard the *Lion's Whelp* they had not forgotten.

The moment they entered the hut which the Indians had given a year before to Sparrow and Godwin, Butshead began to pour questions upon them. The penman and the map-maker silenced him and, leading the mate and Fergus out by a rear door, took them stealthily into the jungle, which crept up close to the village. Thus, when Gorges came to the hut, he found it empty.

The mutineer's suspicions grew as hours passed and they did not return. He was now convinced that Butshead was in the secret employ of Raleigh, that Taruma also was in some plot hatched by the brainy knight, that, as Sparrow and Godwin were true men of Sir Walter, Butshead was winning them over to his purpose, even as doubtless he had won over the Scotsman Fergus, and perhaps some others.

What this counterplot might be he was not at all sure, but as he sat cooling his heels on the ground before the deserted hut, he reasoned to a conclusion that could not have been more accurate had he been one of the council which Sparrow, Godwin, Butshead and Fergus were holding at that moment in the jungle.

The penman and the map-maker told their story very briefly, once satisfied that Butshead was loyal to Raleigh and waging secret opposition to a ship's company which had set out from Plymouth with no other intention than to steal the fruits of Sir Walter's great discovery in Guiana. As Gorges surmised, Sparrow and Godwin were Raleigh's true men and had labored in his interests for over a year.

With the friendly aid of Topiawari and his people they had been able to explore a great part of the surrounding country. Sparrow, the penman, had written down his observations, which made up a bulky narrative. Godwin had illustrated the narrative with a goodly number of maps drawn to scale. They had thus gained a vast amount of information relative to the people, the country and the latter's possibilities, particularly in the matter of metals.

Sparrow had not brought his bulky manuscript into the jungle with him, nor Godwin his maps, save one which he ever carried ready for additional insertions. This he spread upon the ground where the four men squatted in a circle in a little clearing of the jungle. Four heads came close together over it and Godwin's finger traced out the course of the Orinoco in that region, its tributaries, islands and rapids.

"All this," said the map-maker, sweeping his hand over the greater part of the chart, "we ourselves have visited, but this part—" laying several fingers on the region to the north and west of the falls of Caroni—"we have not seen, because none of Topiawari's people would guide us there, few who have ever ventured having returned."

Godwin pointed to a feathered circle to the northwest of the Caroni Falls and said:

"There is the glittering mountain which Raleigh saw and from which he and his company brought the yellow ore. Not even there will the Aromaia go and we, having been there with Raleigh, have been contented to know that it is there and remains there."

"But why do the Aromaia fear to venture there?" asked Butshead.

"It is in the kingdom of Guascar, and his people, descendants of the Peruvian Incas, who are powerful warriors in battle but good neighbors, otherwise, having but one desire

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—to be left alone. They fled from Peru many years ago to escape the interference of foreigners, especially the Spaniard. Only one European ever went there and returned alive—one Juan Martinez, whom they spared for that he had quarreled with his master, Diego Ordas, who was advancing to loot their city of Manoa, or, as Martinez named it, El Dorado."

"Of him and his travels I have full knowledge," said Butshead quietly, "and that he spoke truth is evident from this map, for see—" placing a finger on an outlined lake with a cross on its shores and the word "Manoa"—"thou hast placed the city and the lake in exactly the position in which he said he had found it. The direction from the Caroni Falls is also correct."

"Good!" said Sparrow. "This we have not dared visit, but have learned much of it, particularly its position, and the other reason why none ventures there."

"What is that other reason?"

"A tradition which is probably old wives' babble," said Godwin, "but enough to discourage where one goes without guide or support. The jungle between the falls and El Dorado is said to be inhabited by a race of men who are giants in stature, but have no heads."

Butshead laughed. The Scot's eyes took on a queer look of superstition. Sparrow and Godwin, men of considerable education as the time went, laughed a little, too. Suddenly Godwin, as if ashamed of the absurd turn the talk had taken, folded up the map and hid it in his bosom.

"But now," he said sharply, "who are these men who obey the rascal Gorges? What is their purpose and what yours in their company?"

For answer Butshead briefly related everything from the time of the meeting in Rat Lane, of the lie circulated concerning Raleigh's ores, of Raleigh's desire that he—Butshead—should travel with the company as a secret agent, ostensibly of his uncle's interests but really of Sir Walter's, and of his last words to him—"Remember thou art my man, Dickon Butshead, and so whisper to Sparrow and Godwin."

"Aye, aye," said Sparrow, "we be good men and true to Raleigh, but how can we serve against a crew of rogues? Gorges, Scroop and some of the old crew have been to the mountain before. They can go again, and how can we prevent their returning to the *Fearless* with their boats laden to the gunwales with golden ore?"

DICKON BUTSHEAD studied the ground for a few moments. Fergus watched him with his searching blue eyes and felt that the lad did not say all when he answered:

"Let them bring away that gold, if they can, and return with it to England. That I was present when Raleigh first found the mountain and again when Gorges and his crew robbed the mine of which Sir Walter took possession in the queen's name, and that this map of thine corresponds with that which Raleigh made with his own hand and hath in London, should prove that Raleigh was no fool, liar or dreamer in the first place—confound his enemies, principally my Lord of Essex—return my master to the royal favor and win for him the queen's ships and men for a greater expedition to add a new empire to the domains of Elizabeth."

"And we?"

"Do nothing but stick close to Gorges and —bear witness to the plot they execute for a handful of traitors—an avaricious alderman, a jealous lord, two lying assayers and a miser of Rat Lane who sought to make a thief of his sister's son—traitors who seek not only to rob an honest gentleman of his laurels but risk their heads in that they would cheat the Crown of its one-fifth of all treasure discovered."

Sparrow and Godwin rose to their feet, as did Fergus and Butshead. The faces of the two former were burning with indignation, not for what the Crown might lose or what certain rascals might gain; but they were Raleigh's good men and true; they worshiped Raleigh as the Devonshire lad did; for a year, amid the perils of the Guianian jungle they had served him to the great end that an empire might be added to England's domain—until that service had become almost a religion and Raleigh the idol.

"Butshead," said Sparrow, holding out his hand to the lad, "when we knew thee aboard the *Whelp* thou wert but a scullion. Now thou art a man with a spirit that finds echo in me. Lead on. We will stand by thee, for Raleigh and honor."

They returned to the hut where they found Gorges, who had been joined by his crony, Scroop, darkly conversing in front

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of it. The rascals scowled as the quartet appeared before them. But Butshead took the dilemma by the horns in a way that astonished Fergus, Sparrow and Godwin. Turning to the penman and the mapmaker and waving a hand toward Gorges, the young mate said pleasantly:

"Here is the bo'sun, Bulkhead Gorges. 'Tis right, Masters Sparrow and Godwin, that ye should know. Barbary remaining aboard the *Fearless* and I being right young for such a perilous venture, I have received much support from him. I propose that we take him into the council we would hold."

Fergus, Sparrow and Godwin seemed taken aback by this move. Gorges, on the other hand, brightened visibly.

"And Scroop?" said he.

"Aye, that's fair enough. Scroop—for the men," said the mate.

They all entered the hut, the loyalists still somewhat puzzled. Butshead looked straight into Godwin's eyes and said:

"Up to now we were depending on my memory of the directions given for reaching El Dorado by Juan Martinez. Show them the map thou hast made, Master Godwin, from thine own observations and hearsay, so they will know that Martinez spoke truth and I had the right of it all along."

Godwin hesitated a moment and glanced at Sparrow, who seemed quite amazed; then his eyes fell upon the blue orbs of the Scot. And one of these blue eyes twitched encouragingly. Then Godwin produced the map, and thereafter six heads pored over it for a while.

Any suspicions that Gorges might have entertained gave place to exultation at the manner in which this map coincided with Juan Martinez' narrative as frequently outlined by Butshead. To reach the mountain of gold, and more than that, El Dorado itself, seemed now as simple as traveling from Plymouth to London. All they had to do was go west until they reached the Caroni, travel up that as far as it was navigable by the boats, then march through the jungle, first to the mountain and then to the golden city by the lake.

"Pity 'tis that Topiawari is dead," said Sparrow, "for now ye can not hope for Taruma's guidance. He is king. There will be many ceremonials and after that, as king, he would not be allowed by the elder chiefs to risk his life."

"But," said Gorges, "he may appoint one of his warriors to guide us."

Sparrow and Godwin both shook their heads. They had tried in vain to find a guide to lead them to the golden city.

"They fear the Ewaipanoma as children dread spirits of darkness."

"The what?" inquired Scroop, alarmed even by the word.

"The race of headless giants who infest the jungle between here and Manoa," said Sparrow with a solemnity that made the Scot's eyes twinkle.

"But what need of any guide?" asked Butshead bluntly. "We are white men and not children."

At that Gorges clapped the mate on the shoulder.

"Eh, lad, I was mistaken in thee. Thy blood is good English red! What I says is, let's be going. By the time we come back, our boats filled with the yellow ore, Aromaia will have done lamenting its old blackamoor king and we'll be in time for celebrating the new one."

Again he clapped Butshead on the shoulder.

"Eh, lad," said he genially, "thine uncle of Rat Lane should be main proud of thee!"

The Scot pondered deeply. Sparrow removed his hat and frankly scratched his head. There was something here he could not quite fathom.

BUT it was three days before the laws of hospitality would permit them to depart. Butshead had but few words with Taruma, who, as king, was forever surrounded by the elder chiefs. The burial of Topiawari first delayed the adventurers, Taruma hinting to Butshead that the people would take it amiss if Raleigh's men—as they were supposed to be—did not remain to do honor to the old monarch who had been the great Capuaralli's stanch friend and adviser.

Then there followed the acclamation of Taruma as King of Aromaia, after which ceremony the white men, with a few exceptions, joined in the debauch with which the Orenoqueponi seemed to mark every event.

Then, their boats restocked with provisions, the adventurers were allowed to depart, an Indian named Maquarima being sent to guide them as far as the falls

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of the Caroni. But, as had been anticipated, beyond that no Indian would go, for fear of the Ewaipanoma, or headless giants.

It was Taruma who, in bidding Butshead and Fergus safe voyage and return, whispered that in his opinion the headless giants were purely a tribal myth. Taruma, at the head of the elder chiefs and the people gave the Englishmen a royal send-off and the two ship's boats presently disappeared around a bend of the stream going west.

Ten minutes later Taruma was confronted by the first of the many difficulties that beset a king, even of a savage tribe. From the east appeared a *canoa* in which was a single Indian warrior. He landed and made obeisance to Taruma, learning that Topiawari was dead. He brought a message that would have taken some of the recent geniality out of Gorges' manner had he heard it.

The messenger was from Caribana, whose tribe, after a serious quarrel and conflict with the women of Carraori, were returning to Macuregai.

Caribana, through his messenger, reported the offense of the white men against the customs of the Orenoqueponi in landing on Carraori during the ceremonies of the Love Moon. He demanded of his overlord—who was now Taruma—that, not only should vengeance be taken upon the white men, but that the warriors of Aromaia should ally themselves with the Macuregai to bring the women under proper submission. Their independence had lasted too long and was now become intolerable.

The messenger further stated that Caribana had already left Carraori for Macuregai, there to wreak his wrath upon the white *acarewana* and his men who had been left aboard the ship. To this Taruma replied, after much grave thought:

"Return ye when rested to King Caribana. Tell him that Topiawari is dead and that I, Taruma, his overlord, command upon peril of war that he touch no hair of the *acarewana*, Barbarai, or any of his men, until I shall have considered further and send him word of my decision."

That night, while the white men anchored beside the island of Caima, near the fork of the Caroni River, Taruma sat pondering his first problem of state.

He knew that the action of the white men at Carraori had constituted an unforgivable insult to the Macuregai and that, as their overlord, he must give the tribe satisfaction. It might even now be too late to save Barbary and his men. What troubled Taruma most, however, was that if his friends Barasai and the blue-eyed man returned alive from Manoa, their egress from the river was blocked by the Macuregai, unless he—King Taruma—sided with the white men and proved false to his own people and their customs.

It was only Barasai and Fergus he thought about. His secret determination ever since he parted with Raleigh was that he should protect Barasai—whom he loved as a brother—and at the same time use all the influence and power at his command to see that Raleigh's enemies, Gorges and company, should never leave the Orinoco with even a handful of the yellow metal which, if it belonged to any white man, was Raleigh's by right of discovery and claim.

He had drawn them on, serving them at every turn, so that he himself might regain his ancestral kingdom. Now he had memory of his promise to Capuaralli. The safe return of Gorges and his company was quite another matter.

And Gorges, lying awake in the boat by the isle of Caima, some ten leagues up the stream, was also pondering. He saw through Butshead's game. He had gathered around him a party, consisting of Fergus, Tillson, Sparrow, Godwin and possibly some others. Upon the return to England these would prove that the gold Gorges hoped to bring back was taken from Raleigh's mine. The Crown would seize it and possibly send Essex and company to the Tower and make less dignified disposal of Gorges and his irresponsible crew.

But then, as Gorges reflected while he looked up at the brilliant Guianian stars above the isle of Caima, something might happen to prevent Butshead and company ever seeing England again.

But first—the gold.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POOL OF DEATH

THE adventurers in the boats at the isle of Caima awoke in fine fettle on the morning after their departure from Morequito. Between the fumes of the

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palm liquor drunk at Taruma's feast, the coolness of the air and the apparent freedom of the isle from mosquitoes, all had enjoyed a refreshing sleep.

The Indian guide, Maquarima, with Sparrow, Godwin and Butshead, had elected to sleep on the isle, which was small but hilly and free from gnat-breeding jungle. It was carpeted with a mixture of fern and a kind of wire-grass. From its highest elevation a good view of the Orinoco and the branching Caroni could be had for a considerable distance.

Gorges, at break of day, left his place in the boat and went ashore, hoping perhaps to surprize the loyalist party in their councils. He found them all asleep except Maquarima, who, over a small fire, was cooking what looked like a goat or a young deer. The Indian greeted Gorges pleasantly and asked at once in his own tongue—

"*Acarewana* like to see Shining Mountain from here?"

Gorges did not understand a word, save the first, which flattered. But at the Indian's speech Godwin awoke with a start and touched Butshead and Sparrow into alertness.

"What's he saying?" asked Gorges. "You know the lingo."

"He says," said Godwin, glancing at Sparrow and Butshead, who were rubbing their eyes, "do you want to see the Shining Mountain?"

"Aye, aye," said Butshead promptly. "He told us last night the gold mountain was visible from the top of this isle and if 'twas clear we might get a glimpse of it this morning. Let's all see it."

Godwin communicated this to Maquarima, who nodded and beckoned them to follow him. He led a way to the highest elevation of the isle and, after scanning the country for a few seconds, pointed directly to the west.

At first what they saw resembled more than anything a luminous cloud, cone-shaped. But as the sun rose in the east and its rays caught the peak of the cone the dim cloud began to give forth rays of its own. Gorges and Butshead did not hide their excitement.

"That's it, for a wager!" cried Gorges. "The same we saw with Raleigh, only 'twas not from this point."

"But 'tis the mountain," said Godwin, and Sparrow corroborated.

They produced the map and showed that the cone-shaped cloud lay, as the sun stood, in exactly the direction and position accorded it on the map. Gorges turned to Butshead and asked shrewdly—

"What distance did Martinez make it?"

"Twenty-five leagues from the falls of the Caroni," Butshead promptly replied.

Gorges knelt down on the wire-grass and carefully studied Godwin's scale-map. The distance appeared by that to be about the same.

"Good for you, lad!" he exclaimed with genuine enthusiasm. "And El Dorado? How far beyond—by Martinez?"

"Not more than ten leagues, bearing more to the north."

Again Gorges studied the map. He frowned.

"This sets the lake and the city more to the south and nearer the upper Caroni."

"We have never been there," said Sparrow, "and set it down only from hearsay, but that it is there and may be easily found we doubt not."

"Aye, aye," said Gorges, his eyes fixed on the glistening cone twenty-five leagues away. "An' I pin my faith to Martinez an' young Butshead. Dickon, thou'rt a right smart lad. Let's be doing!"

He turned to descend the hill, but paused like Lot's wife to take one more look. There was a glare of lust in his eyes.

"What makes it shine so. Think ye 'tis the gold?"

"The outcropping, most like," said Sparrow, himself not unmoved.

Gorges shouted the news when he reached the edge of the isle, off which the boats were moored. The discovery of the mountain in reality had a great effect upon the men. Sleep fell from their eyes instantly and, coming ashore, all made a rush to the top of the hill. There they sat, staring and dreaming dreams of England and opulence.

Only the pangs of morning hunger broke the spell. They returned to the beach only long enough to seize up in their hands fruit, slices of *tortuga* flesh, and some of the small deer Maquarima had dropped with an arrow at daybreak. Then back they all went to the hilltop and sat there eating, staring and occasionally laughing like children on a picnic.

"Now give me a pot of ale," cried Scroop, "and I'd change places with none sittin' on the highest throne."

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"Aye, aye," said Gorges, "but there'll be no more women or liquor until we have at least one boat up to the lip with the yellow stuff that's blinkin' at us there!"

"Gorges is right! Gorges forever!" shouted some of the crew.

As soon as the morning meal was over, the leaders again held council and studied out the course of the Caroni, as far as the cataract, and a dead reckoning through the jungle to the base of the shining mountain.

A fresh start was made within an hour, the extra men, Sparrow and Godwin, getting into the *canoa* which the guide Maquarima had brought along. Late in the afternoon they came upon the falls beyond which they could not go, although Butshead declared that Martinez had been able to carry the canoe he traveled in around the falls and proceed in quieter waters farther up.

There was some talk of making an attempt to get the heavy ship's boats over the falls in the same manner, but Gorges led the opposition and won. True, they might well do it with fourteen pairs of strong arms, but they knew not what windings the river took above and, having once gained a bearing on the mountain, Gorges was for keeping the course agreed upon at Caima. They might not sight the mountain again from the river and none fancied exploring the Guianian jungle on a mere chance of striking it.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in getting the provisions on the right bank of the river below the cataract and packing them for the march to be taken on the following morning. That which they would not need and was not ordinarily perishable, they left in the boats. This included the small carronade and the iron shot which was used in it. The surplus of gunpowder they carefully buried in the ground, covering the mound with a tarpaulin and then a layer of dried leaves.

Some of the more ardent spirits were for camping in the jungle that night, taking advantage of the remaining daylight to press on a mile or two. But the Indian refused to leave his *canoa*. Gorges would have let him go, but Sparrow held council with him, saying that he still hoped to overcome the guide's fear of the upper river and the supposed giants. So another night was spent by the boats, the adventurers either being kept awake all night or lulled to a doze by the incessant roar of the great cataract.

Maquarima was, as usual, first awake next morning. Sparrow found the warrior sitting up in his *canoa* and staring anxiously at the green walls of jungle fringing the foaming cataract. The scrivener, who had traveled in the lesser craft with the Indian and Godwin, at once tried to show the guide why he should accompany the white men, pointing out what fame would accrue to him among his tribe if he was the first to brave the dreaded Ewaipanoma.

Fame of that sort did not seem to appeal to Maquarima, but the sight of an English shilling with Ezrabeta's head on it made the Indian's eyes glow covetously. That shilling Sparrow had borrowed on the previous night from Butshead, who had informed him that it came from the hand of the great Capuaralli. It had, under peculiar circumstances in Rat Lane.

Long was the struggle in Maquarima's breast between superstitious fear and the desire to possess this—to him and his people—almost sacred fetish—the image of Ezrabeta Cassipuna, from the hand of the great Capuaralli. To acquire and present this to his king, Taruma, would bring Maquarima greater honor than to have braved the Ewaipanoma. And was he not under the guardianship of the all-powerful white men?

AMBITION conquered and he took the queen's shilling. When Gorges and Butshead awoke they were surprized and pleased to hear that they were to have an Indian guide to the mountain. Not that he could guide them better than their own common sense and the science of a compass, but there were jungle perils which he could teach them to avoid.

"Aye," muttered Fergus the canny, "but he'll no travel far. Ye see, he's got the shillin'!"

However, Maquarima led the way when the fourteen men—including, now, Sparrow and Godwin—started with their packs on a westerly course, bearing a little to the north.

All day long they traveled on this course, the leaders hacking and hewing a way through a labyrinth that had the appearance of a solid tangle of lianas more than of forest. This tangle was clouded here and

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there by huge webs, in the center of which, in nearly every case, spiders of most prodigious sizes and lurid colorings crouched. Once or twice the hanger that swung down upon a seeming liana cut through something the ends of which squirmed and knotted in the agonies of death.

Fortunately, but principally due to the instantaneous, nervous back-leaping of the men, there were no casualties that first day from either spider- or snake-bite. But the frequency of these encounters so racked the nerves that a first word of retreat would have been seconded and unanimously carried into effect.

Unexpectedly it was the Indian Maquarima who showed the least fear. His mind probably dwelt upon the headless giants as the only things that held terror for him in the jungle, but he helped to assure the white men by stating—through Godwin and Sparrow, who both spoke his language—that the Ewaipanoma moved only in the night. As for the spiders and the snakes, he declared most of them harmless despite their hideous appearance and was much astonished, if not amused, at the terrors of the white men.

Finally, Sparrow had him placed in advance of the lead. The Indian's quick eye detected every living thing in that steaming tangle. Sometimes he halted the company, pointed out some small, innocent-looking worm and advised a wide detour. But for the most part he advanced boldly and brushed down cobwebs or slashed a snake with a contempt that commanded the respect of most of the whites.

Despite their northerly bearing from the west it seemed that the river crawled along parallel with them. At no time were they long out of sight of its bosom, shining through the jungle to the left. Once or twice it twisted inward across their path and they were forced to make a wide circuit to avoid it or its marshes.

The damp heat of the jungle was terrific and the men suffered as in some inferno, weighted as they were with their packs. Butshead, Sparrow and Godwin stood the strain best. Fergus was not as young as he once was and had to admit it. Gorges and most of his fellows looked as if they were on the verge of apoplexy. Water was drunk recklessly and more than one pack was hurled into the underbrush by the stragglers.

Gorges had entertained a hope that by a forced march they might gain the mountain before nightfall, but by four in the afternoon, when they were still—by reckoning—a good ten miles from it, a halt was called. The men, utterly exhausted by their unaccustomed travel on land and ground of the worst nature, dropped their packs and themselves beside them.

It was then found that there was a startling shortage of water. Whether it had been drunk and the empty kegs thrown away, there was certainly nothing like the supply Gorges had calculated they had at the start. He considered it their luck that the river had borne close to their own course all day. But half an hour before they had seen it gleam through the trees to the left. Gorges at once commanded a fellow named Thorp—whom he had elected his boot-slave after the tragic death of Grimes—to take a keg and go back to the river for water.

Thorp sullenly obeyed. As his servitude suggests, he was of the weaker order. He was probably more exhausted than any of the others and less fitted for this extra exertion. The conscienceless brutality of Gorges in this instance led to another disaster, the nature of which Butshead readily surmised afterward.

About half-way to where he supposed the river was, Thorp carrying his keg, came upon a pool seemingly fed by a spring. Dusk was closing within the shadowy jungle and Thorp, not only tired but fearing he could not find his way back to camp, filled his keg at this pool and came sauntering back just easily enough to kill a little time.

Butshead, Fergus, Sparrow and Godwin were not in the group around the newly-built fire when Thorp returned with the water. The exhaustion of old Fergus and his thirst had aroused the pity of Sparrow who, like many penmen of his time, was voracious of subjects to write about and had learned a lot during his year among the Orenoqueponi.

He had led his three friends a little way into the jungle until he found a liana as thick as a man's arm. Telling Fergus to be ready to drink he cut through the soft, pulpy creeper with one stroke of his hanger. Out of the cut end spouted a stream of water. The stream did not last long, but was enough to quench the thirst

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of all four. It was not the famed traveller's palm, which is not natural to Guiana, but what is known as the water-withe, which has saved the life of many a man in the South American jungles.

When they returned to the camp the rest of the company was crowded around Thorp's keg, awaiting turn to fill a cup from it. The Indian Maquarima was acting queerly. Two had taken a drink when he suddenly pushed forward, tilted the keg so that a sprinkling of water fell into the palm of his hand.

Instantly he dashed the cup from the lips of Scroop, who was about to drink, and frantically began to babble in his own language. Gorges at once shouted for Sparrow or Godwin to interpret. Both appeared at the same instant and Sparrow translated the dreadful tidings.

Maquarima said the water was poisonous. It occurred in many places and was known as the "red water." Sparrow related only what the natives said about it, having no positive knowledge himself. It was safe to drink it at midday after the sun had shone upon it for some hours, but at other times, particularly between sundown and sunrise, it was more or less deadly.

At this news Gorges turned in fury upon the unhappy Thorp and demanded to know where he got the water. Thorp confessed, whereupon Gorges said brutally—

"'Tis most like more old wives' babble, like the headless giants, but to make sure, we'll ha' Thorp drink a pint of it himself!"

"If it be poison," groaned Thorp, his face growing pallid as a dead man's, "then there be no need for me to drink. I drank deep at the pool."

Even as he spoke he put his hands to his heart and stomach, staggered toward a tree, clutched at it and sank to the ground, violently nauseated. A few minutes later he became unconscious.

Still the others, particularly the two who had taken a draft of the "red water," refused to believe that Thorp's illness was due to anything but fear and suggestion. Yet in a short time they too became ill.

Thereupon Gorges deliberately emptied the cask of its poisonous contents. Maquarima and Butshead offered to go to the river for good water, but the thirst of the company had suddenly and mysteriously vanished. Also all appetite. Few cared to eat. A roaring fire was made. The men lay around it, wide-eyed, staring at nothing.

CHAPTER XVII

THE GOLDEN DAWN

THAT night in the Guianian jungle was of the sort that tries the nerves of the bravest.

Not one of the company could have explained in so many words just why it seemed so. By silent accord they circled around the camp-fire, getting as near to it as they could without burning themselves; all endeavoring, too, to make the circle so close that one man might feel a neighbor's shoulder touching his on either side.

No one ate or drank.

Outside the circle lay Thorp and the other two men who had been laid low by the poisonous water from the pool. They groaned incessantly, but never spoke, indicating that they were not conscious.

It seemed to every one that a ghastly silence had fallen upon the company. Each felt that he could not have uttered a word or two had he been called upon to do so. Perhaps it was less the pall of silence and depression that had fallen upon them than the fact that their hearing and their nerves were strained abnormally to exterior sound and movement.

For there was noise enough outside of the camp circle. The jungle roared like a cataract, or rather like a mighty factory in which every spinning wheel is badly in need of oiling or tightening up; for the uproar was made up of a shrieking, snarling, clattering, muttering and, above all, an ear and brain piercing note like the singing of an enormous cricket. Toward the river this cataract of noise was supplemented by an endless reptilian chorus, a steady jubilant guttural.

The whole discordant volume of sound was punctuated quite frequently by a blast of some animal's rage. This, and all the rest of it, the adventurers might have tolerated as the usual night chorus of the jungle, but there were certain elements that got upon their nerves and reduced them to the state of frightened children.

They were painfully conscious, after the day's experiences, that that jungle was alive with spiders and snakes of all sorts, sizes, shapes and hues. The commonest

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gnat might not alight on a man's hand or his face but he would start with a gasp and wildly brush himself.

Then, too, it was obvious that the three men who had swallowed the "red water" were dying. Their groans, the only human notes amid all that animal uproar, came with painful clearness to the strained hearing of the silent fellows by the fire. When about midnight Thorp became still and they saw that he was dead, the nervousness of the living increased. The other two men died soon after, leaving the company of adventurers reduced to eleven, including Sparrow and Godwin, but not the Indian, Maquarima.

The native's conduct was most disconcerting. He made no effort to treat the sick men, saying that nothing could be done for them except, once they were dead, to bury them immediately. That this was necessary was presently clear, the poison in the water having apparently a disintegrating effect. The digging of a trench within the radius of the firelight and the interment of the unlucky trio occupied the men for some time; then they settled down again to a depressed silence more profound than before.

Now that they heard no more the groans of their comrades the senses of the living were the more strained upon other things. That the camp was surrounded by many and a variety of strange creatures was clear from the mysterious sounds and shadows that came within sight, or hearing, or imagination—which was even more unbearable. Eyes peered from the dark circle of underbrush. At these the Indian fearlessly hurled a brand from the fire. Occasionally, as some more than ordinarily ghastly sound burst upon them, a man would gasp—

"What's that?"

To which the Indian, through Sparrow or Godwin, would reply, naming some animal contemptuously.

Once some huge night-bird, attracted or blinded by the glare of the fire, darted right into the center of the company, then turned confusedly this way and that with a great squawking and a flapping of mighty wings. This was too much for the nerves of the company. With one concerted yell every man got to his feet, shielding his head, as if the very devil had descended among them. Again it was Maquarima who assured them that the bird was harmless and more frightened probably than even themselves.

But for all his seeming bravery the Indian was in the agony of his own private terror. When he was not reassuring the white man about one thing or another he was crouching upon the ground, his head bent over his knees and glancing from side to side at the black jungle closing in around the camp. Once or twice he made a curious sound of terror in his throat and then he was observed to shake all over and crouch like a terrified or beaten dog.

It was after they had buried Thorp and the other two that Gorges, in an ill-calculated effort to break the spell of silence, said to Sparrow—

"What ails that blackamoor?"

"It's the headless giants he's afraid of," said Sparrow, adding after he had addressed some words to, and got a reply from, Maquarima: "He says they are about and he has seen several already. He says the Ewaipanoma have been watching us since dusk."

At the effect of this announcement upon the men Gorges realized he had made an error in bringing up the subject at all. But he attempted to mend matters by laughing.

"Old women's babble!" said he. "Let's hear more of this fairy tale, Sparrow—you that knows so much of these blackamoors."

"I know no further than hast heard thyself through this man's fear to pass Caroni, save that the Ewaipanoma are a strange race, half man, half beast. They grow seven and eight feet tall, even though they possess no heads, save as exist where heads should not be."

"How mean ye, Sparrow?" put in Scroop with a quick glance at the woods.

"Only as I have heard," said Sparrow, "that they have eyes in their chests and from their shoulder blades grows their hair."

"Eyes in their breasts and hair on their shoulder-blades!" Gorges scoffed. "How, then, do they eat?"

"I know not, never having seen," said Sparrow quietly. "None who may have seen ever returned to tell; but they are supposed to be cannibals."

A shiver ran around the nervous circle, the more pronounced as it was suddenly discovered that Maquarima, shaking like

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a leaf, was staring at a certain point of the forest beyond Gorges' shoulder. Gorges involuntarily turned quickly but, seeing nothing, and ashamed of his yielding, stretched himself out with a contemptuous "Bah!" and closed his eyes.

"Curse you, Sparrow, if they haunt my dreams; but sleep I must, and mean to."

The others followed his example, glad perhaps of the excuse to shut out sight, and possibly sound, for the rest of the horrible night. It did seem for a time as if weariness would claim every man of them, but no sooner had the camp settled down into a somnolent doze than it was startled to wakefulness by a hair-raising yell. Instantly every man was on his feet and nearly all saw what was happening.

Running as if pursued by a million fiends and yelling at every step was Maquarima, the Indian guide. He was heading in the direction by which the company had come on their march of the previous day and presently he disappeared in the darkness of the jungle. But not before five or six of the white men at least had seen that he was pursued by the vague shapes of gigantic men and not before Gorges, in a fit of rage had drawn a pistol and fired it in the direction taken by the retreating deserter.

Then a curious thing happened. As the echoes of the pistol died out it was observed that a deathly stillness had fallen upon the jungle. The roar of animals, insects, night-birds and reptiles had ceased as if cut by a pair of shears, or at the signal of that pistol-shot.

This sudden cessation of sound in the midnight jungle is not an uncommon occurrence; it is indeed quite usual in the lull of a thunder-storm; but to those who have never experienced it before it is an awe-inspiring thing.

Maquarima and the shadows pursuing him had quite disappeared, but the loss of the Indian was overlooked in the new terror that descended upon the white men. One man was sitting with his head buried between his knees and he was groaning loudly:

"My God! I saw them. I saw them. And they didn't have any heads!"

Butshead, remembering Taruma's whisper that the headless giants were nothing more than a tribal myth, instantly cried:

"Bah! You were dreaming of them and but imagined it. But I grant thee there were men there on the heels of Maquarima, and if I ha' any voice, I say, let's be up and moving! At least we be rested and there will be no sleep in this hellish place. What sayest thou, Gorges? What say ye, lads? 'Tis but ten miles to the mountain. We can make it by daylight and be rich men before sunup. What say ye?"

"Let's be going from here at least!" cried Scroop.

"Aye, aye!" chorused the men.

"Butshead's the wise lad," said Gorges. "He took the words from my own mouth. 'Twill avail nought to stay here. But how to make our way through the jungle in this pitch blackness?"

"What's darkness to a sailor?" said Butshead. "We ha' the compasses and here's torches in the fire for fifty men."

"Let's be going! Let's be going!" urged the man who had had his head between his knees.

"Aye, aye!" cried Scroop cheerily. "The lad's right. We'll be rich before sunup."

THE horrible spell of the night was broken. The men even set up a faint cheer. The majority were for setting off at once, but the wiser were for some forethought, which mainly concerned water. It was proposed that half of the company should take torches and kegs and get water from the river.

The proposal was good enough, but not good enough for the milk-livers who were to remain on guard at the camp. After some argument it was decided that the entire company should go to the river, obtain the water, be guided back to the camping-ground by the glow of the fire and from that point resume their march toward the mountain.

More than half of them armed with torches, they made a rough compass line for the river, which, they knew, might be struck anywhere south and east of the camp. On the way they came upon the pool from which Thorp had drawn the keg of deadly "red water." Despite their thirst, which had returned redoubled with the abatement of their terrors, the men passed by the pool with a shiver, casting fearful and curious glances upon its innocent-appearing surface.

They presently found the river and filled the kegs at a spot some distance above where the "red water" outlet might flow in.

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Then, guided by the glow of the camp-fire, they returned to their base.

They saw no sign of the mysterious warriors, nor of the Indian, Maquarima, who had fled in fear of them. But on the way back to the camp, as they halted for breath, Scroop made a discovery which aroused the adventurers' uneasiness again. By the light of the torches Scroop discovered close to his face something sticking straight out from the bole of a tree. Examination showed it to be an Indian arrow, its head sunk in the bark. Apparently Maquarima had been shot at.

Expecting to find the Indian's body, they searched around the spot for a few minutes. They found no human being, dead or alive, but Gorges came upon a young banana leaf upon the bright yellow surface of which there was a glistening dark smear. He touched it with his fingers. It was wet and slightly sticky.

"That's blood!" he whispered. "They must 'a' hit him, anyway."

The discovery again filled the men with dismay, but not with the jungle terror which had overwhelmed them all night. The uncertainty of Maquarima's fate only urged them the more to push on.

"He was a deserter, anyway," said Gorges, thinking about that shot he himself had fired.

"Aye, aye," said Fergus to Sparrow, "but 'tis sad to think o' a man deein' for a shillin' he couldna' spend anyway."

Presently, when every man had taken his share of the water and what remained of the packs and armed himself with a torch, the march to the mountain was resumed. Godwin leading with a compass, followed by Sparrow, Butshead and the rest of the company. Gorges brought up the rear, to see, as he explained, that none straggled or threw away his pack.

That march in the dark of the early hours was remarkable for nothing but plain discomfort and not a little fear. They saw no signs of the mysterious enemy, with heads or without. They were troubled little by jungle creatures, which probably scurried before them, frightened by the line of flaming torches. There were no stragglers, even the weariest being willing to stagger on rather than be left in that jungle.

The first graying of day further gladdened them by showing that the jungle was thinning and that they were probably nearing open ground. The latter appeared quite abruptly. Gorges had come forward at the first sign of dawn and was walking with Sparrow, Godwin and Butshead when suddenly the jungle ended and they found themselves on the edge of a wide field covered with long wire-grass.

Beyond this field there was gently upsloping stony ground, which suddenly rose steeply in a high, conical hill.

At sight of this eminence Gorges raised a yell that brought the stragglers hurrying forward into the security of a solid group, not knowing what new thing was happening. But there was the mountain and at sight of it all raised a lusty—if somewhat husky—cheer. At the sound, a great flock of parrots, stirred from their night sleep, whirred up from the surrounding jungle with an infernal explosion of shrieking.

"Look at it! Look at it!" yelled Gorges.

"Gold! Gold! Gold!" roared the crew.

While Gorges bragged of his own prowess in bringing them direct to the spot, challenging the men to say whether he was a fool or not, Butshead, Sparrow and Godwin curiously stared at the mountain.

It was indeed an amazing sight. It was the same they had viewed from the hillock on Caima exactly twenty-four hours before, and conditions were the same. The sun was not yet up, but from below the eastern horizon its first rays touched the peak of the mountain, and from the rocks there began to shoot rays of refraction that could only come from the outcroppings of some brilliant metal. As the sun crept up the light crept down the side of the eminence; and ever as it descended the rays continued to shoot back at the solar orb.

As this radiance increased Gorges' excitement and that of his followers could not be controlled.

"What are we standin' here for?" cried Scroop suddenly. "Let's get near to it. Let's have it in our hands. Afore sunup, said Butshead!"

"Aye, aye," said Fergus drolly. "Ye'd best hurry. It may be the Lord juist dropped that bit hill there by mistake an' may come back lookin' for it."

But already Gorges and his particular cronies were running through the wire-grass toward the base of the mountain. Water-kegs, provision-packs, even guns were dropped in their haste. Fergus, Butshead, Sparrow and Godwin followed at a more leisurely pace.

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The way led over comparatively earthy ground for some way. Then the grass became interspersed with boulders and small stones. Ahead of them Scroop suddenly uttered a yell and held up above his head a rough breakage of rock, one whole side of which was a glittering mass of metal. At that the company slowed up, but still kept on toward the mountain itself, intently studying the ground. And every now and then one, or two or three at the same time, would raise a kind of view-halloa and flourish a chunk of metal-gored rock.

By the time the majority of the company had come upon the side of the mountain where a landslide had deposited tons of broken rock-chips, large and small, Butshead and his company had entered the area where the wire-grass grew upon stony ground.

All at once Butshead stooped down, picked up a metal-veined piece of stone and, after a glance at it, placed it in a little bag he took from his pocket. At that, Fergus, Sparrow and Godwin followed his example and began to collect and stow away about their persons the more richly endowed bits of rock their eyes lighted upon.

When they came upon the main company it was to behold a curious scene.

The men were acting like madmen, or as if they had suddenly swallowed an overdraft of some powerful and swift intoxicant. They were yelling, dancing and sometimes groveling on the ground while they clawed among the smaller stones, seeking the pieces of ore that were most readily portable on the person. And ever the cry was:

"Gold! Gold! Gold! Tons of it! Mountains of it! Gold!"

Gorges himself had picked out a fat spot where the ground seemed fairly to shimmer in the first rays of the now-risen sun. At his feet was a pile of yellow-stained stones. His crony, Scroop, was to his right and had, inadvertently perhaps, worked toward his chief. Suddenly Gorges drew a pistol and brandished it in the air while he stood astride his pile:

"Back, —— ye!" he roared. "Any man that comes within five fathoms o' me I shoot like a dog!"

Butshead, in the meantime, sat down on a rock, took out of his pouch the first piece of ore he had picked up and as quietly extracted from the breast of his doublet a small phial with a feather stuck through its cork. He withdrew the cork and the feather. The end of the latter, moistened by the liquid in the phial, he touched to the yellow metal in the stone.

A curious smile lit his face.

"Is it gold?" whispered Fergus at his elbow.

"Fergus," said Butshead quietly. "If you and I were in London Town and had a ton of this, we would be worth at least twenty thousand pounds!"

"Aye, aye," said the Scot dryly, "but we're mony a long league frae London Town."

They were, and many a difficult league. Even the Scot did not dream how difficult, for even at that moment another mark was being scored against the retreat of the whites.

AT THAT moment the Indian Maquarima lay dead, not in the jungle but back in the town of Morequito to which he had made his way down the swift river current in his *canoa*, dying. There was a wound in his back and the young king, Taruma, when he looked upon it, knew it for a bullet-hole. His people knew it was not made by an arrow and whispered fiercely among themselves.

In the right hand of the dead man was clutched a silver shilling bearing the likeness of Queen Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XVIII

CAPTURED

THE sun rose higher. Its uninterrupted rays beat upon the shining mountain and the gold-crazed men thereon with a fierce, dry heat that was very different from the moist, steamy breath of the jungle.

For some time Gorges and his crew paid little attention to their discomfort. Their one thought seemed to be to gather all the yellow metal in sight in one wild burst of energy. If one paused to wipe the sweat from his brow or straighten the knots out of his back, he at once became conscious that all the others were picking up chunks of ore as fast as they could, and himself

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would resume the more energetically to make up for lost moments.

They seemed to have forgotten all about share-and-share-alike, or that, as a matter of fact, whatever gold they took back to England with them was, if not Raleigh's property, at least that of Essex, Alderman Piggott, Master Simons and others who had financed the venture. They did not give a single thought either to Barbary and his men at the river-mouth and what they might consider their claims.

No. Every man of them had the gold-craze in its worst form; every one but Dickon Butshead and Fergus, whose conduct presently aroused the ready suspicions of Gorges. Even Sparrow and Godwin had yielded to the craze and each had his pile of ore apart from the others.

Butshead was not altogether idle. He had a small pile of nuggets at his feet. He sat on a rock beside them and carefully touched the outcroppings of yellow metal with the fluid from his little phial. He worked very slowly and without excitement; but there was a glow of satisfaction in his eyes.

Fergus, on the other hand, complained that it was hot, managed to find a rock that cast a large enough shadow to hide him from the face of the sun; and there, tilting his hat over his eyes, the Scot lounged and whistled tunelessly. Not one piece of ore did he pile on top of another.

In the tropics the forenoon has a fierce, white, blinding ferocity not surpassed at any other time of the day. The brazen, listless afternoon is only nature exhausted and limp. By ten o'clock that morning some of the men were lying by their piles of ore in a pitiable condition.

The first madness was over and the reaction on. Their faces were caked with dust and sweat. The salt moisture from their brows had rolled into their eyes and half-blinded them. Their mouths were darkly rimmed, their lips cracked and blackened and their tongues were like half-cured leather.

Each and every man was mad for a drop of water, but all knew that the kegs and the packs had been dropped on the other side of the wire-grass field. It was not more than two hundred yards; yet so did the gold-madness affect these men's minds that each feared to leave his pile for a minute.

Fergus, in the shadow of the big rock, saw the situation and grinned. Gorges saw the grin and opened on him a volley of curses.

"Aye, grin, —— thee!" he shouted. "What's thy game, anyhow? Lyin' there out of the sun an' half asleep when there's thousands o' pounds lyin' loose for the pickin' up. If ye will do nothin' else, maybe yer lordship will go bring a keg o' water to us?"

Fergus, who felt thirsty himself, arose to his feet very deliberately and said:

"Aye, aye, I'll fetch a keg. But," he added with vast anxiety and staring at the mountain, "haud on to the mountain, lads! Dinna let it flee awa' in ma absence. That's a' I ask. It's been there since the Lord pit the hills in order, but ye never can tell about a mountain. It's an awfu' tricksy thing!"

And off he went, chuckling and muttering. Half-way across the wire-grass plateau he stopped and looked back at the shining eminence. Satisfied that it was still there, he continued until he came to the spot where the men had dropped the kegs. He first took a hearty draft himself; then, selecting the fullest of the kegs, he shouldered it and returned to the gold-mad company. The men almost fought for turn at the keg and there was not a drop of water left in it when it had been passed around twice.

Then Gorges, whose vindictive rage and suspicion had been growing apace, turned upon Fergus who had again sunk down to rest on the shady side of the big rock.

"Fergus," said he with bitter irony, "wouldst thou ha' the kindness to turn to and gather up some of the stuff? Or maybe, like the canny Scot thou art, thou'rt hopin' for thy share without the labor of it?"

Fergus was gazing thoughtfully at the mountain.

"Gorges," said he, and his speech came like a bombshell, "how d'ye propose to get that stuff out to the boats?"

"Carry it, thou fool!" said Gorges.

"In what? Yer pouches? Lord, man, ye alone hae between yer legs there enough to keep a mule staggerin' back an' forth for a week, let alone a man burdened with his packs.

"But maybe," the Scot went on in a bantering tone, "maybe ye plan to build a bit mill here and crush out the stuff and

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melt it in some sort o' furnace. I grant ye 'twill be hot enough for the furnace, but the mill—ye see there's nae water to mak' power, short o' the river which is a good ten leagues off."

At the mention of water and the remembrance of the ten leagues of jungle between them and it, a silence fell upon all. Eleven pairs of eyes, too, fell upon the empty water-keg which lay near Fergus. The Scot touched it with his foot and it rolled away, coming up against a boulder with a hollow thump.

"Aye, aye," said the Scot, "noo I see the plan. I admeet I'm slow in the up-take. But it took your brain, Gorges, to devise that scheme."

"What scheme?" Gorges demanded with unconcealed anxiety.

"Why, drink up a' the water, then fill the kegs wi' gold, bringing a fresh supply o' water on the return. Aye, aye! But, eh, man, it's an awfu' expensive beezness—and slow!"

There was silence as the truth of the situation slowly dawned upon Gorges and his undisciplined, unforethinking crew.

"My God!" suddenly exclaimed Scroop. "We been fools! We got to begin all over again. We got to go back to the boats before what water we ha' left is done. We c'n carry a little of this stuff in our pouches —just to remind us 'tis no dream—and next trip we will ha' thought out a better plan."

"Go back an' leave this stuff picked and piled!" protested Gorges, still hoping for some other solution of the problem.

"Ye c'n aye put some o' yours in the emp'y keg, Scroop," Fergus suggested.

"Aye, an' make you carry it!" said Gorges with an ugly note.

"Aye, aye," said Fergus coolly. "Did ye ever hear what happened to the McPhairson when he cocked his beaver at the McTavish?"

As there was trouble enough brewing without an internal fight, Gorges let the question of McPhairson's fate remain unanswered and proposed that a few hands cross the field and bring up some more water and the provision-packs.

As the men were hungry after their labors and the refreshing water, this motion was carried unanimously. Two or three men, including Butshead, crossed the field, but came back in rather a hurry and with astonishment and some alarm on their faces.

"Stuff's gone!" announced Butshead blankly.

"What? How? Where?" stammered Gorges, glancing evilly at Fergus, who was now sitting up by the rock, wide-eyed.

" 'Twas all there a half-hour agone!" said the Scot. "I saw it with my own eyes."

"I believe ye, Fergus," said Butshead, "but 'tis gone now for a certainty and there be marks all around as if men or animals had been there and carried the stuff into the jungle."

"No water!" groaned Scroop. "An' ten leagues to the river."

"Aye," said Fergus, "an' not even the kegs to carry the treasure in."

At this Gorges turned upon the Scot with a roar of rage. He drew a pistol from his belt and leveled it at the man recumbent by the rock.

"Thou!" he roared. " 'Tis some trick of thine, for a wager. The stuff was there a half-hour agone. Who has been there since? This is some trick o' thee an' Butshead and the rest that's with ye. Ye look to divide the treasure among yoursel's when all's done. But by the lord Harry! there'll be one less to your party!"

There could be no doubt that the man meant to shoot and shoot to kill. He was purple with rage. But something in the voice that spoke behind him bade some instinct pause.

"Hold your fire, Gorges," said the map-maker, Godwin. "In another minute ye may need that shot to save yer own skin. Look around thee."

Gorges spun on his heel, expecting to find Godwin's pistol at his back. True, Godwin had a drawn pistol in his hand and was in the act of cocking it. But he was not looking at Gorges; neither was anybody else. All eyes were staring across the wire-grass field.

THE mystery of the moving human shadows which had so frightened the unhappy Maquarima and the mystery of the disappearance of the kegs and packs were instantly explained.

Spread out in wide skirmish order and coming at a curious run from the edges of the jungle toward the company of white men, were about fifty half-naked warriors.

"The headless giants!" gasped Scroop.

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The description was absurd, of course, and all saw that it was so as the warriors, waving long spears, came leaping lithely through the long grass.

Yet there was enough that was curious about their appearance to account for the fear in which they were held by the tribes of the lower river. Their heads seemed prodigiously large and set upon stalwart, almost gigantic bodies. But the abnormal look of the heads was due only to the fact that these Indians wore enormous ear ornamentations.

By one of those not infrequent tricks of mental association Butshead's mind flashed back to the Blue Boar Tavern that night Ben Jonson had referred to the boy listening at the door as "of the Orejones, or long-eared people." Jonson had been talking that night with Raleigh, who had probably been telling the company some of the Orinoco legends, among which were the headless giants and the long-eared people. Perhaps they were one and the same.

Then, too, the Spaniards, in the pillage of Peru, had named the Peruvians Orejones on account of their ear ornamentations; and was not the Manoa tradition concerned with the descendants of the murdered Atahualpa? It flashed upon the comparatively well-read lad in that moment that the people whom they had come far to seek had found them first; that these were the Peruvians of El Dorado.

He communicated his thought at once to Master Sparrow, advising him to try to talk peace with them and make the point of his argument that they were English white men and enemies of the Spaniards. That was the card by which Juan Martinez had won.

The Indians, in the meantime, were within gunshot and Gorges was getting ready to order a discharge when Sparrow took command.

"Don't shoot!" said he to the mutineer leader. "This may be a stroke of luck. They are the warriors of El Dorado. If I can make peace with them they may lead us to Manoa; and if we win to their liking they may load us with the gold they have such plenty of and even lend us of their people to bear it to our boats."

"Down weapons!" said Gorges. "But be ready and sharp."

At the same time Master Sparrow fearlessly advanced from the line of white men with his arms uplifted, the palms of his hands open.

"Hail, Orejones! We are friends!" he cried in the general speech of the Orenoqueponi.

At a cry from their leader—a mighty man who led the center—the warriors halted and returned the salute, lifting their spears high in air and repeating the cry of their leader.

Perhaps the only word they understood had reference to their "long ears" and it was Spanish enough to rouse suspicion. The leader made a quick angry speech to Master Sparrow, who laboriously replied in the simplest words of the river tribes. He was understood.

As soon as the leader gathered that these were enemies of the Spaniard and that the ambition of the English was to drive the Spanish out of the land, the Orejones became quite friendly and mingled with the white men in a spirit of almost childlike curiosity. They seemed particularly interested in the metal of which their pistols and hangers were made. The white men were yet to learn that, compared with iron and steel, the Peruvian descendants and even Taruma's tribe considered gold as so much useless dross, except for its pliability in the making of beautiful objects.

As soon, too, as an armistice was established, the leader, whose name was Tarupanoma, stated through Master Sparrow that he and his followers were guardians of the border of Guascar's country—Guascar being the King of El Dorado and a descendant of Atahualpa, the murdered Inca of Peru, from which the survivors of the Spanish massacre had fled to found a kingdom where they might live happy and undisturbed.

Tarupanoma made it clear that the white men were not prisoners, but the guests of Guascar, to whose city, some leagues distant, they must accompany the guard. When this fine distinction was translated, Fergus the Scot seemed to be amused.

"But how about this golden ore?" whispered Scroop to Gorges in Butshead's hearing. "Are we going to leave it lying heaped up for the next comer?"

It was Butshead who whispered sage advice.

"As you value your skin—you, Scroop, Gorges and all of you—pay no attention to it. If they find out it is this yellow metal

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that makes white men invade their privacy it will be short shrift for all of us. Play the game with discretion and we shall see the famous El Dorado—aye, and come away from it rich, too!"

"The lad has the right of it," put in Fergus; and for once Gorges agreed.

While Sparrow was conversing with the Indian chief two of the natives had run back across the wire-grass field and into the jungle. They presently returned shouldering several water-kegs and packs, which Tarupanoma graciously returned to their rightful owners.

"By the Lord Harry!" muttered Gorges. "'Twas them watched us all night and stuck Maquarima. 'Twas them ha' watched us all morning an' stole the water. Easy, lads, easy! Keep level heads and we'll win out. But we're in a tight corner for all that."

"Anyway," said Butshead with enthusiasm and clapping Sparrow the penman on the back, "we'll see the famous El Dorado!"

"Pray God," said Sparrow quietly, "that I may live to write down what I behold there."

CHAPTER XIX

EL DORADO

THE march from the shining mountain to El Dorado was a pleasant interlude, compared with much that had gone before and what the adventurers were yet to experience.

After a short struggle through dense jungle, Tarupanoma and his guardian warriors brought Gorges and company out upon a well-beaten path which had evidently been cleared long since and was much used. Within its green-walled confines there was some shelter from the direct rays of the sun and the jungle on either side was exceedingly beautiful.

No vicious animals or reptiles were seen. Occasionally a deer darted across the straight green lane. Birds of all sizes and hues fluttered on all sides and at intervals the sky-line was darkened by flocks of chattering parrots or shrieking paroquets.

The pleasant going, the seeming amiability of the Indians and the spice of curiosity which flavored this latest adventure, raised the spirits of the white men mightily. Gorges particularly was again in a good humor.

The Orejones marched ahead and only looked over their shoulders at intervals to accommodate their pace to that of their prisoners, or guests. Among them walked their leader, Tarupanoma, with Master Sparrow by his side. They were conversing freely, and it seemed that the more they talked the better their understanding grew. Tarupanoma told Master Sparrow quite freely of the recent history of his people.

Some way behind, Gorges walked with Godwin the mapmaker and Butshead. They, too, discussed the city of many a tradition and the people who were supposed to have founded it. Allowing for Butshead's memory, the probable exaggerations of the fever-crazed Juan Martinez and what Godwin had set down on his map from hearsay, what Gorges gathered was strangely close in the general facts to what Sparrow gained from Tarupanoma. Of course there were variations, but such variations were to be expected.

For instance, the direction in which the city lay from the falls of Caroni was quite at variation with Manoa's position on Godwin's map. It also varied from that assigned to it by Martinez. So far as Butshead could make out from his compass they were traveling due north, but if that were so, then, either something had gone wrong with the compass or the sun had risen that morning due south; which, in that latitude, was impossible.

Butshead seized opportunity as it occurred to compare his compass with those carried by his comrades. He made no comment on the apparent fact that either the earth had gone off its orbit or all the compasses were out of order.

Briefly, as Butshead reviewed Martinez' story for the benefit of Gorges and Godwin, the city of El Dorado lay to the northwest of the river on the banks of an immense salt lake some two hundred leagues long. The city itself was supposed to be a vast affair with fine buildings of stone, the pavements before which were of gold and the interiors rich with sacred vessels and ornaments of the precious metal.

According to Martinez, the emperor was wont to sail upon the lake in a galleon the upper works of which were of pure gold. The city itself was so vast, according to

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Martinez, that it took him from noon of one day until sundown of the next to travel afoot from its edge to where the palace of Guascar, the emperor, stood.

The white men were doomed to disappointment in a great many points thought to be established; but in after years Butshead, not then so young or willing of credulity, realized that it was ever thus with first reports of discoveries. The excited imagination of Juan Martinez, the fervid, colorful fancies of the Spanish poet, Lope de Vega, the equally poetic temperament of Columbus and even of Raleigh himself, had often gilded facts without any intention of distorting truth. The bleakest landscape of a Wintry day may be a valley of paradise on a Spring morning, and vice versa.

In the same way, every step the white men took at the heels of their guides toward the golden city added one more splash of color to their excited fancies. Even the fact that Tarupanoma suddenly called a halt and, making apology through Sparrow, informed the white men that they must now all be blindfolded, convinced them the more that every word Martinez had spoken on his deathbed was absolutely true. He, too, had been blindfolded. That itself might account for the variance in direction, although it did not explain to Butshead—then—why the sun should be in the conspiracy to baffle intruders upon the Peruvians' city.

They submitted to the blindfolding with good nature. Then the advance continued, each white man having an Indian at either arm to keep him on the trail. The English company continued their conversation, being assured that the Orejones knew not a syllable of the language. They once more agreed upon what they should agree upon for their present conduct.

"First," said Butshead, "pay no attention to whatever gold you see; or pretend not to. The first thing to win is the good-will of Guascar and his people."

"And no liquor!" put in the Scot from somewhere to the rear, adding as an afterthought, "or wimmin."

"He's right," said Godwin the mapmaker. "Any one of three things spells disaster to fools—liquor, women and gold. Beware when ye are tempted by all three at once."

Gorges grunted but passed on the warning to his followers. So the march kept on for another hour or two. The monotony of plodding over unknown ground with the eyes blindfolded is something to be experienced for realization of its irritation. They had been climbing what seemed a steep hill and halted for breath at the top when Gorges suddenly burst out with:

"Hey, Sparrow! Ask that *acarewana* when we are to make port."

The penman put the question in language comprehensible to Tarupanoma, who replied:

"The white men have been patient. They are about to be rewarded. Manoa lies before their eyes, even if they can not see. But they will see all in a very short time."

Then the way led down a descent which seemed as sharp as the ascent had been. A cool breeze blew in their faces and all at once Fergus exclaimed—

"I smell salt water."

"Salt water!" echoed some of the others, amazed.

But Butshead said:

"Why not? The city lies on the shores of a salt lake."

That they were near water of some sort was presently clear. They could hear the lapping of waves. Presently another halt was called. The adventurers, still blindfolded, were divided into groups, conducted by their warrior guides to the water's edge and their feet assisted into boats of some sort. A few minutes later five large *canoas* were shooting across the lake toward the town which was on the other side, although they did not know it until, when they were well out from the shore, the blindfolding was removed.

At the first glance around him Butshead, astonished as he was at what he saw, could not help thinking in a flash how impossibly situated they were against returning to the Caroni and the boats without the help and guidance of Guascar's warriors.

The laden *canoas* were right in the center of the lake. To the east was a range of low-lying, jungle-clad hills sloping down toward the surface of the water. Keenly as he scanned the shore from which the *canoas* were receding, Butshead could distinguish no break in the trees where the trail might have approached the lake, no marks on the shore that would indicate where they had embarked.

Whether there were two hundred leagues of water beyond possible bends at each end

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of the oval-shaped salt lake, all that did not seem landlocked to Butshead was not more than five or six leagues long and about a league across at its widest part.

The town, too, which was now widely visible on the western bank had shrunken like the mighty lake of which Martinez had spoken. If the adventurous Spaniard had taken a day and a half to walk from end to end of it, it must have been that he was blindfolded and continually walked in circles.

But there was a good-sized town which, at first glance, was of infinitely superior build to anything the adventurers had seen in Guiana hitherto. And it was situated on a salt lake, as a taste of the water convinced Butshead. He decided at once that, in miniature proportion and allowing for the excitement of Martinez' mind at the time, this was Manoa, or El Dorado.

The matter of its wealth might diminish with the other points of description. In fact, it remained to be seen whether the town contained any wealth at all. Still, Butshead was confident that El Dorado might possibly deserve its name. The huge ear ornamentations that the Orejones wore gave evidence that the people knew gold, had plenty of it, and knew how to work it.

Gorges burst out with an oath of disgust.

"——! This is no golden city, but another settlement of blackamoors."

"This, an I mistake not," said Butshead quietly, "is Manoa. Look ye at that building far to the right there."

He referred to the largest house in the town, which could no longer be termed a city. This house was built of stone and had a tower with ramparts from which, at each corner, arose a kind of spire with a shining emblem tipping each.

"And that's gold by the color of it," said Fergus.

As the *canoas* approached what seemed to be a general landing, it became apparent that, while the whites were traveling blindfolded, Tarupanoma had sent ahead a messenger to notify Guascar of their coming, for this landing was crowded with warriors surrounding some older chiefs. Behind the warriors there was a great gathering of women, old men and children, all in the brightest attire—such as it amounted to—and seeming to enjoy the novelty of this unexpected visit from the white-faced strangers.

BUT if there was any excitement at the landing it was much on the side of the Englishmen, but they strove, and not without success, to conceal it. Hardly a sound was made by the Peruvians—if such they were. The leader of the incoming frontier guards, Tarupanoma, spoke a few words to an old chief who was perhaps the only one who regarded the whites with a frown of suspicion. This old chief was perhaps quite aged enough to recall dimly the disaster which had befallen his people when the Europeans came to Peru sixty-six years before. But he accepted Tarupanoma's explanation and bowed with a slight brightening of his face. The whites fell into a double column at a sign from Tarupanoma. A guard of warriors formed on either side of them, and then began a march from the landing through the streets of El Dorado.

Brief as was the journey—for Martinez' day and a half shrank into less than half an hour—every foot of the way was marked by novelty and interest.

First—the general appearance of the town. Obviously it was not of long standing as time and settlements go. That it had been carefully designed in every detail was clear from the straight parallel lines of the streets that crossed the central avenue along which the procession moved.

The houses were for the most part built of stone, only the poorer and temporary structures being of wood and thatched. The adventurers noticed that the street-crossings were occupied by larger houses, some of which might have been the dwellings of the elder chiefs, or the barracks of guardian warriors; others again had the appearance of being governmental buildings or possibly houses of some religious cult. These more imposing buildings were crowned at their highest eminence with the same emblem they had noted from the lake upon the highest structure. This emblem was of shining gold, apparently, and was shaped like a long-necked sheep, which Butshead thought to be the Peruvian llama.

Further evidences of gold were not as plentiful as Martinez had reported, but Gorges and his comrades whispered to one another with considerable excitement when it was discovered by one that, while the streets were not paved with gold, they were

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smooth and hard through a surface covering of finely crushed ore of some sort. Metal showed through the compressed stone in small streaks and blots of yellow. It was as if the ore of the shining mountain had been crushed for street paving, or this material was the refuse from some refining process.

For the rest, one thing puzzled the white men considerably. The whole town seemed dressed as for some gala occasion. Banners of colored wool floated everywhere and the warriors were resplendent in vari-colored blankets, also of the same material. It could hardly be, then, that this was in honor of the white men's visit. There could hardly have been time for all this, even had Tarupanoma's messenger—if he ever sent one ahead—arrived hours before.

To return to the people themselves, they thronged the central avenue and gazed with wonder on the fair strangers. Their general attitude was reassuring. Even the old men, who at first regarded the Englishmen with some mistrust, now smiled and nodded. The warriors, especially those who had captured the whites, were by this time on the best of terms with their "guests."

The women and children who lined the way or peered over the parapets of roofs, laughed, clapped and waved their hands. They were a handsome people and the women, particularly the young and middle-aged, came not far short of actual beauty. They, too, were dressed as for some great occasion.

Presently the avenue up which the procession had been advancing came to an end, or rather its straight line was blocked squarely by the tall building they had seen from the lake. It was identified readily by its high tower and the pinnacles surmounted by the llama emblems.

Tarupanoma, through Master Sparrow, informed the whites that it was the palace of the emperor, Guascar. Thither the adventurers were being taken, and they went willingly enough, for so far the adventure had been fraught with much wonder and pleasure.

Within one hundred yards of the palace entrance, the avenue suddenly widened into a considerable square. In the center of this there were green gardens with a natural spring spouting up from the ground and forming a pool. On the ledges of this pool, built of larger pieces of the yellow-studded ore, *tortugas* and small *lagartos* played, climbing on the ledges, dozing there, or suddenly splashing back into the pool in luxurious play.

Past this pool went the adventurers toward a stairway of broad stone steps. This stairway ascended to a huge doorway over which was a great shield of gold. In the middle of it, among other curious devices, was the same emblem of the llama but in larger proportion than it appeared elsewhere in the town.

At the head of the stairs stood a double line of guards, who wore cuirasses of yellow metal and were armed with gigantic spears tipped with the same metal or chips of the spar-like stone containing it.

The strangers passed this guard unhindered and found themselves in a vast hall, the ceiling of which was gilded and the walls adorned with golden images and painted with strange devices. At the further end of this hall several steps ascended to a slightly higher floor.

On this, and against the rear wall, was set what was unmistakably a throne. On it sat a very aged man who from his dignity and benignity of mien could be no other than Guascar, King of the Orejones and, lineally, Inca of the Peruvians, of whom these people were descendants.

The white men followed the example of the warriors and bowed low at the foot of the steps. While the elder chiefs ascended and ranged themselves on either side of Guascar, grandson of the murdered Atahualpa, the king gazed with much interest upon the fair-faced strangers. Finally he addressed some words to Tarupanoma, who told his story of finding the white men. Sparrow understood most of what was said and wrote it down at the first opportunity afterward.

Tarupanoma concluded his narrative by saying—

"Remembering the will of my Lord Guascar I brought these strangers that my lord might look upon them for himself."

"Are they of the race that murdered my grandfather?" asked Guascar, a cloud upon his brow.

"Nay, Inca. They are the most powerful enemies of the people who came to Peru with the dog Pizarro. They are followers of the great Capuaralli, of whom my lord has heard."

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Guascar seemed satisfied. He made a lengthy speech to Tarupanoma. The latter translated it to Sparrow, who in turn rendered it in English to his anxious comrades.

"The king, Guascar," said Sparrow, "says it is well for us we are not of the Spanish, else would we suffer death by burning. He says that he favors us the more that we are followers of that great chief, Capuaralli, of whom he has heard much from his brother prince who is now dead, Topiawari, late King of Aromaia.

"He mourns greatly the death of Topiawari, whom he loved. These two, Topiawari and King Guascar met, shortly after Capuaralli's departure from Morequito, at the borders of these two kingdoms. In this conference they made a treaty—that the Inca and his people should everlastingly be friends with their neighbors, the Aromaia, if the Aromaia in turn defended the gateway to the kingdom of the Peruvians.

"For know ye, white men, the Inca says he seeks no enemies, so long as none seek his enmity. Had ye been of the Spanish ye had died this hour, but as enemies of the Spanish and brothers of the Aromaia and their new ruler, Taruma, ye are made welcome to Manoa and shall be treated as guests."

"Good!" grunted Gorges when this was translated.

"Down on your marrow-bones!" whispered Butshead, who had been conscious that the eyes of Guascar had been watching the effects of his speech upon them.

Butshead set the example and presently all the white men had made obeisance to King Guascar, who smiled and then spoke again. Through Tarupanoma and Sparrow his words were:

"The white friends come at a time of great joy, for this night is the full of the moon and the feast of the golden gods. They shall sit at my right hand."

Gorges, Scroop and some others could not conceal their pleasure and delight. Butshead looked uneasy. Fergus grunted something that sounded like—

"Liquor!"

In dismissing the audience, Guascar said:

"Take them now, my children, and lodge them well. Look to their every comfort and pleasure. Bid the maidens attend them with meats and give to each of them such raiment as is befitting a chief and one who comes to the feast of the golden gods."

The white men, having once more made obeisance, were presently led out.

"The luck holds good," whispered Gorges to his crony, Scroop.

"Mmmph!" grunted the Scot.

And that was all.

CHAPTER XX

THE DANCE OF THE GOLDEN GODS

THE ground covered and the rapid succession of events between the discovery of the shining mountain at dawn and their finding themselves in El Dorado before dusk, left the adventurers a little dazed but not surprized. It seemed that nothing could greatly surprize them now, yet that very night they were to experience something the description of which in after years was not always to be received with credence.

The white men were conducted by Tarupanoma to one of the large corner houses already noted. It was the barracks of the town guards who policed the streets of El Dorado even as Tarupanoma and his rural guards patroled the kingdom. Here the white men were supplied with fresh clothing, Indian in material and fashion but obviously of a kind to be worn by persons of no common rank. They were also shown a pool in the central yard of the quadrangular building and invited to bathe.

This they did, after Fergus had satisfied himself that the pool was free from *lagartos* and snapping turtle. When refreshed by the cool bath and attired in their Indian raiment, Gorges suddenly growled—

"What I want to know is, Sparrow: when do we eat?"

Sparrow translated and the guards disappeared. Presently, to the delight of the white company, there entered upon the scene about two dozen Indian maidens. They carried cups and long-necked calabashes. The men fairly gasped. They had noted much beauty among the young women of the Orejones but had not looked to behold any such picked specimens as these. The Scot grunted doubtfully.

The maidens laughed and showed white teeth. Their features were almost Greek in contour and their lips and eyebrows as shapely as if stenciled. Their dress consisted mainly of a kirtle of lace-bark and around their brown necks strings of *lagartos'*

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teeth, varied with polished scales from the *tortugas'* backs.

Undoubtedly these maidens were trained attendants, and they knew the art of pleasing the lords of mankind. They seemed all the time to be highly delighted with their task, which was to appease the hunger and thirst of their masters. Gorges and the rest found themselves each with a goblet in his hand and a maiden ever ready to fill it from one of the long-necked calabashes. The latter were carved curiously, the carving inlaid with yellow metal.

Young Butshead studied his maiden attendant less than the goblet and he found opportunity to touch with his little niter brush the surface of the vessel.

"Is it gold?" whispered Fergus at his elbow.

"As near pure gold as gold can be," said Butshead offhandedly.

Gorges paid less attention to the gold cup than to the maiden who was offering to fill it from the calabash.

"'Ere's lookin' at ye, m'dear," said he gallantly.

The cup was almost to his lips and already his nostrils had caught the spirituous scent of the palm wine when Dickon Butshead sang out:

"Ho, Gorges! How stands the agreement? No liquor and no women?"

The goblet stopped within two inches of Gorges' mouth and he turned a wry face upon the young mate.

"I' faith, lad," said he, "I was thinkin' about that same when ye spoke. 'Fact, I was just agoin' to call a halt myself."

Fearing what might happen, Scroop had taken advantage of the moment to drain his goblet and get it refilled. Butshead and Fergus were for dispensing with the liquor altogether, but Gorges shrewdly pointed out that this might cause offense to the Orejones.

"It's all right so long as we don't make sots of ourselves," said he, unconsciously reciting the devil's first rule for the making of all sorts of sinners.

Then, it having been discovered that Scroop had made a law unto himself, the rest followed suit. Fergus groaned. Whether it was despair or his Scots sense of thrift, it is a fact that he drank off his own dram and advised Butshead to do likewise.

Then the maidens served food and one—sometimes two—sat beside each guest and saw that he ate plenty, the women themselves adding spice to the meal by picking morsels from the plates. These plates were also of gold, as Butshead whispered after he had had a chance to touch one of them with his feather.

"Their utensils alone," he said to Fergus, "are worth a fortune for every man of us, but for our lives' sake let no man even think of doing what Pizarro did. Keep friendly and we can load up at the mountain."

The white men, by the time the meal was over, were feeling more than refreshed. Once the ban on liquor was lifted there was no limit to the amount consumed. As fast as the maidens filled the goblets the latter were emptied. Then ardent spirits led to ardent affections. The whites insisted, like sailors ashore, that their ladies also sip from the same cup.

Gorges, more than half-drunk, sat like some ancient sea-king, each of his brawny arms encircling a dusky beauty. And the dusky beauties in his and other cases did not seem in the least displeased by the situation. They even sang the love-songs of the Orejones, and Gorges and Fergus nearly came to blows when the Scot insisted upon singing that ancient, interminable ballad, of "The Douglas Tragedy."

Just about the time when Butshead was thinking that the most fortunate ending of the matter would be for all hands to be drunk enough to desire sleep, there arose a great clamor from beyond the quadrangle, in the town itself and in the direction of Guascar's palace. At that the maidens sprang to their feet and clapped their hands. At the same time into the inner yard of the building in which the whites had been lodged came Tarupanoma and his guards.

Butshead, who had been more sparing with the powerful palm liquor, noted with misgiving the surprize of Tarupanoma and his men at the obvious condition of the white guests. All, with the exception of Butshead, Sparrow, Fergus and Godwin, were more than half-drunk. Tarupanoma engaged in a whispered conversation with the scrivener, who presently turned to the mate and said:

"Fergus was right. They've made a grave mistake at the outset. At their feast of the golden gods, which it seems is about to begin, every warrior is supposed to drink a goodly share of liquor and to

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come prepared to that end. Our company has anticpated matters in a way that may leave them far behind before the night is half over."

Butshead realized the situation at once. He drew Fergus aside and hissed something in his ear. Fergus nodded and next minute he was singling out the least intoxicated of the whites and passing the warning to them, while Butshead relieved his mind to Gorges and Scroop.

It was quite remarkable how these worthies braced themselves. When they followed Tarupanoma and the maidens the only apparent symptom of their recent libations was a certain air of over-sobriety, like that of a gentleman with a guilty conscience who must pass his own butler before he gains his bedroom.

They left the barracks and came out upon the main thoroughfare. The latter was now ablaze with torches and thronged with the Orejones, all moving toward the plaza in front of Guascar's palace. Here was a prodigious stage-setting for the feast. The pool of the *lagartos* and *tortugas* had been covered over and turfed. It now presented a fairly large grassy plat. At the palace end of it there was a dais upon which stood an immense image of a llama, either gilded or of solid gold. Between the fore- and hind-legs of this was a throne, and in it sat the aged Guascar.

He was semicircled behind by the elder chiefs, but at the emperor's right and left there were a number of vacant seats which, it transpired, were for the white guests.

To these seats Butshead and his company were led. The mate cast an anxious side-glance or two at his comrades as they crossed the open plat under the eye of the old monarch. Gorges and company seemed to walk with considerable steadiness, but Butshead thought he saw a darkling frown on old Guascar's face.

But he bade them be seated with a fine courtesy and then waved his hand for the feast of the golden gods to begin.

THIS feast was a curious thing from first to last, but even Butshead failed afterward to recall clearly how it ended.

First, the elder chiefs paraded before Guascar and made obeisance, either to him or the huge golden llama—or possibly both. The younger chiefs followed next. Then the common people set up a mighty acclaim that was almost deafening.

After these preliminaries, scores of men—not warriors—appeared bearing huge trenchers upon which were all sorts of animals roasted brown and almost floating in their own juices. Others carried stacks of plates. And Butshead needed not his feather and his nitrate to know that all these trenchers and plates were of the precious yellow metal.

"Look at the gold! Look at it!" whispered Gorges.

The whites were already full to repletion, but they made a pretense at eating. What they failed in justice to the food they made up for in drafts of the liquor which again the maidens passed around.

As the orgy progressed the Orejones themselves failed to note the hopeless intoxication of the fair-faced strangers, perhaps because they, too, had swallowed enormous quantities of the palm wine. Even the ancient Guascar was drunk upon his throne. He continually clapped his hands and scolded the maidens for not being attentive enough. And continually he consulted with the elder chiefs who, oddly enough, did not drink but kept their eyes fixed upon the skies to the east where the first flare of a full moon was appearing. The climax of the feast of the golden gods was due to arrive with the great orb.

Perhaps the inattention of some of the maidens was due to the fact that those who had served the wants of the white men after their arrival had been captured by them. Gorges had the same two as before, one on either side of him. The mutineer's arms encircled his two dusky beauties, who softly sang the Orejone love-songs that had before pleased his fancy. Fergus, noting this, started to sing in a raucous voice the continuation of that interminable Scots ballad:

> "He's liftit her on a milk-white steed,
> And himsel' on a dapple gray,
> With a buglet horn hung down by his side,
> An' fast they ride away."

"Silence!" roared Gorges.

Fergus sprang to his feet, but Butshead pulled him down just as one of the elder chiefs lifted his voice in a queer, priestlike whine. Instantly all turned to the east. There through the branches of the trees and glinting upon the eaves of the houses

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was that which the Orejones called the Gold Moon.

The priest called something again in the same priestlike voice, and instantly every man of at least warrior rank stripped himself to his loin-cloth. At the same time there began a fanfare of sheep's horns accompanied by a steady beating of stone drums. The more than half-naked warriors entered the grass plat which covered the *lagartos* pool and began to dance to the beat of the drums.

At first the dance was quiet and stiff. The men kept their arms at their sides and even their legs moved in the measure with not unlike that strut which is characteristic of the turkey-cock.

But as soon as the moon rose above the trees and the house-tops and rode clear in the heavens the elder chief cried a halt. Every dancer stopped still as if petrified and raised his arms above his head. It was then that King Guascar, through Master Sparrow, bade the whites strip to their loin-cloths and take their places with the others on the plat.

Butshead and his company obeyed and it was then noticeable that some of the whites, particularly Gorges, Scroop—and, sad to relate, the Scot, Fergus—were distinctly unsteady on their feet.

Then the curious part of the ceremony occurred, that which immediately preceded the actual dance of the golden gods. The maidens appeared with bowls filled with some liquid, viscid stuff and crude brushes. They proceeded to paint the men on the plat, Orejone and white alike, with this stuff, which was nothing but melted balsam gum.

The maidens with the balsam bowls disappeared, and almost immediately other maidens entered, some carrying long blowpipes, others bowls containing a yellowish powder which glittered in the bright moonlight. The maidens with the blowpipes poured handfuls of the yellow dust from the bowls into the pipes; then, applying the pipes to their mouths, squirted the shining dust over the sticky bodies of the dancers on the plat.

Every portion of their bodies, even their heads, were sprayed until the fifty or more on the plat appeared in the moonlight like animated images of gold. Then the maidens, their duties ended, retired, and the elder chief gave the whining priestlike signal-cry.

Instantly the horns and drums started up again, this time in a livelier measure which became louder and faster every minute. The gilded warriors—the golden gods—resumed their dance, but this time they spun and gyrated and pranced like madmen, at the same time yelling and performing the most amazing contortions. The white men were quick to catch the idea. Gold was the god! They were the golden gods! This was their dance!

Gorges' howls of ribald joy could be heard above all the others and he pranced with the most nimble. Once he gathered old Fergus into his arms. At this the white men joined in couples and, yelling hilariously, danced around the plat.

It was a strange sight and one which Butshead, comparatively sober so far as liquor went but intoxicated by the drama of the scene, never forgot to his dying day. The shifting figures, seeming like statues plated with gold, whirling and spinning while the horns brayed and the drums roared and the moonlight glinted upon the gilded bodies. And ever the thousands who looked on acclaimed the golden gods, half-believing, it may be, that these fair-haired, fair-faced strangers from across the sea were indeed supernatural.

Every time a dancer paused for breath a maiden ran to his side with a goblet of wine which stimulated him to further mad prancing. It was on such an occasion that Gorges set a bad example. He drank the goblet of wine, then recognizing one of his dusky favorites seized the maiden in his arms and with a howl of coarse mirth danced away with her into the middle of the golden gods.

That was one of the last things young Butshead distinctly remembered. Once, as through a haze, he thought he saw the king, Guascar, lying senseless drunk on his throne between the golden llama's legs. At another time he found himself trying to figure how the moon came to be directly overhead. Then he saw Gorges fall flat upon his face and Fergus follow him. Shortly after that the whole world swam before his own vision and he fell headlong upon the trampled turf.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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THE FINISH

by Holda Sears

WHEN the crash was over Jim Gardner opened his eyes and wondered just how much of him was left intact. He tried out his one uncrushed arm cautiously and essayed an experiment with one uninjured foot. But when he lifted it straight out into open air he brought it back with an involuntary catch of his breath. For he had discovered that only a few inches of crumbling earth lay between him and a straight fall of fifteen feet into the rocky gulch below. The place was picturesque to view; but he did not care to tumble unceremoniously into it in that fashion.

It was not a pleasant discovery. And it was followed by a twinge of pain in his leg. He cautiously reached down his arm as best he could without changing his position and found that the leg was swelling viciously; but he could not decide whether it was broken or only smashed a bit. He tried to roll closer to the ledge; but the unmerciful pain this caused brought on a cloudy and vague oblivion.

His last hazy thought was the fervent hope that they would not delay the search for him too long. Afternoon shadows were already drawing longer and a night to be spent on such an uncertain perch was not to be anticipated with much pleasure.

Jim had been riding lazily along the edge of a bluff, his tired cow-pony traveling with its head down, when a little Spring rabbit, streaking across the bluff darted under its feet. The suddenness of the bit of gray fur startled the pony and it wheeled quickly. Its forefoot sank into a prairie-dog hole and Jim catapulted from the saddle as neatly as if he had intentionally flung himself off.

With the bridle reins thrown over its head and trailing on the ground, the cow-pony took it for a signal to pause and graze a bit. It pulled its hoof quickly from the hole, surveyed the air uncertainly for a moment as if wondering why its rider had vanished so utterly, and then began calmly to graze until he should return.

Jim, thrown over the edge of the bluff, rolled over and over, trying to break the force of his fall by clutching the bunches of tough grass that grew here and there. The grass and shelving dirt broke his fall somewhat as he landed on a narrow ledge jutting out four or five feet below the bluff.

He opened his eyes when the crash was over to find that his back felt as if every ridge in the spine had an individual grievance. His first effort at movement brought home to him clearly that if his leg was not broken in twenty places it was putting up a good bluff.

"It's going to be my life's work to figure out some way to exterminate prairie-dogs, all right," he groaned. "Now, what's the next move for me?"

The next move was a faint. Jim literally had had the breath shaken out of his body. He at least was spared the worry of knowing, for a few moments, at least, that the afternoon was growing late and that there would likely be no search made for him until he failed to return for supper.

Even then, it would take an hour to ride out to the gulch, supposing they knew he was there, which they did not. Twilight

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was of short duration and darkness in that latitude fell with a disconcerting swiftness. It was perhaps fortunate for Jim that oblivion for the moment, had wiped out his capacity for thinking out what might happen to a man with a broken leg, a crushed arm and only a few inches of ledge to lie upon all night.

While he lay there inert, a movement from a clump of shrubs close to the side of the bluff indicated that a previous resident had been disturbed by the sudden entry of a stranger in his domain. A weaving length of smooth, dark skin, mottled here and there with irregular forms that finally settled into a regular pattern of smooth diamond design, emerged from beneath the bluff where it had been wound close to the dust.

When Jim opened his eyes for the second time, he found himself looking straight into the jetty, unwinking eyes of the biggest rattlesnake he had ever seen in his life. As it appeared to Jim just then, it was a mile long and as big 'round as a barrel. In reality the smooth body measured six feet from tongue to tip of the rattles on the slender tail and the body was as big, perhaps, as the lower part of Jim's arm. Just at that moment, it was the snake's proximity rather than its size that concerned Jim.

He blinked for a moment, hoping that it was a delirium and that the snake might vanish if he could wink long enough. But the snake only stared coldly and impassively. It was perhaps as much surprized and startled as Jim. The two remained staring silently for some moments.

"Thank Heaven, I can't move," thought Jim swiftly, "and thank Heaven for that Winter at the box-office that taught me the frozen stare. I can outstare any snake living."

There seemed nothing else to do so they looked each other over carefully. The more he saw of the snake the less Jim liked it. He had heard tales of what happened to men on the range when they were bitten by a rattler, and the memory of them did not serve to quiet his nerves just now.

His only safety, he realized, lay in remaining absolutely still. Any movement for safety would not only result in throwing him from the ledge but would bring on with a lightning-like swiftness the stroke he feared. He dared not move his arm to reach his gun holster.

Once an involuntary movement of a muscle of his leg when the pain gave a twinge caught the attention of the snake. Within the second it had coiled, with its head weaving warily back and forth. Jim, sick with the first absolute fear he had ever known in his life, waited for the stroke and wondered what he would look like when they found him.

"Death on the rocks wouldn't be much worse than the bite of this bird," he reflected quickly, "but chances are he'd get me before I could get over the edge and then I'd have the rocks and the poison, too. Better stay and take my medicine. There's one chance in a hundred, if I keep still."

The rattlesnake, as a matter of record, will not attack unless aroused to anger and Jim had no intention of making this snake mad. He lay rigidly still now and the snake gradually loosened its coil and seemed to regard him less suspiciously. Centuries seemed to pass as the heat of the afternoon sun beat fiercely on him.

"Strike, —— you," he muttered — and then held his breath lest the movement of his lips should attract the suspicion of his ledge mate.

He waited again, and then cautiously fluttered the corner of an eyelid open. There was no sound—but plenty of snake. And for the next few hours Jim Gardner forgot his situation and his injured leg in the observation of the most thrilling spectacle of his life.

The rattler had quite forgotten Jim in the appearance of a new visitor. It had whirled about to face the direction of the ledge, from which a big brown bull-snake was slowly drawing its huge bulk.

It advanced with majestic dignity. Now and then the convolutions in its body would rear like the curves in a cat's back when she gets good and mad. Then it would pause and raise its flat head a foot or so from the ground for an inquiring glance about. It was during one of these scouting glances that the bull-snake saw the rattler. At the sight of those gleaming eyes and the diamond-marked back, the head of the bull-snake at once dropped to the ground and flattened on the crumbling ledge.

Jim became so absorbed in watching the encounter between the two that he forgot

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his own danger. He was literally hemmed in, in any event. Cautiously, as the two snakes faced each other and their attention was no longer concentrated on him, he hitched himself closer, inch by inch, under the bluff. Here he found himself in a more comfortable position.

"Take the right of way, gents," he murmured. "As far as I am concerned both of you are the general traffic manager from now on."

Once more the rattler coiled, as if in answer to the murmured words. Only this time it gave a formal warning rattle and darted its head in the direction of the bull-snake. The latter drew back in time to escape the stroke; and the slender, forked black tongue of the rattler darted in and out of his yawning, white-lined mouth like a streak of virulent black lightning.

The bull-snake was slow in its movements and seemed sluggish and inactive beside the quick, nervous movements of the more brilliantly marked adversary.

The rattler began a quick movement toward the bull. It made a dart at the other, much to Jim's surprize. He had always heard that the rattler invariably coils before striking; but at least three times during the scrap that followed, he saw the rattlesnake strike without coiling.

After opening the battle with his first fierce rush, the rattler became a veritable tangle of forked lightning. Its colors played in the sun like burnished copper and seemed to dazzle the bull-snake, which hesitated for a moment as if seeking an avenue of escape.

The black tongue of the rattlesnake played constantly like a slender streak of destruction. The big bull-snake suddenly lifted its head and darted it at the rattlesnake, as if emulating the other's point of attack.

In a flash the infuriated rattler flung itself nearer its enemy and farther away from Jim, much to the relief of the latter. Once more he carefully edged in an inch or so from the crumbling edge of the ledge on which he lay.

The rattles of the diamond-back hummed ominously, like the buzz of a dozen blue-bottles on a hot Summer day. The rattler had wisely taken up a position on the shady side of the bluff, and the bull-snake was forced to fight in the sun, where the light plainly dazzled it. Every once in a while, it would lower its head and flatten it on the rock, trying to get the hot rays of the sun out of its eyes.

The bull-snake was an old-timer, it was plain to be seen. It broke up the fight into rounds by crawling back into the bushes occasionally for a brief rest.

The rattler did not seem to need rest. It occupied itself during these spells by throwing coils with the ferocity and rapidity of an electric shock. Sometimes the wily bull-snake would draw a strike by a feint and when the maddened rattler would fling itself forward, the other would spring back out of harm's way.

Never in all his life had Jim witnessed such a struggle, so evenly matched and fought with such grim viciousness. He wondered why the venom of the rattler did not seem to affect the bull-snake, for more than once he was sure he had seen the stroke take effect. He could not see where the bull-snake had a chance, as he possessed no poison fangs. He did not know of the bull-snake's one sure means of defense, which made him watch every movement of the snappy rattler, whose rage seemed to grow with the failure of each stroke. The rattler's dots of eyes seemed to emit regular sparks of green fire and its delicate mouth was torn at one edge.

It still held its vantage-ground in the shade and seemed to hiss its triumph when it could manage to keep the bull-snake in the sun. The latter seemed to realize its disadvantage and was quite evidently blinded by the glare that met it full in the eyes. It tried to entice the enraged rattler from its corner with darts and lunges and twists, carefully avoiding the strokes that came in a hissing, pelting fury.

The bull-snake's last feint accomplished its desire, for as the rattler jumped almost its full length toward its enemy after one of these darts, the big bull whirled for the corner from which it had routed the unsuspecting rattlesnake.

The thing was done so quickly that the bull-snake was snugly ensconced there before the rattler realized what had happened. It cost the bull a wound, however, for as it passed the rattler lurched and buried its fangs in the writhing, gliding brown body of its enemy. The bull quivered just a moment under the shock and turned vindictively to renew the combat.

The rattler was discouraged at being

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thus maneuvered from its stronghold. Its head drooped wearily and it was inclined to keep its adversary company in a brief rest between rounds. The bull was also tired and worn with the struggle; it crawled slowly into its corner and lay there with a wary eye on its enemy.

The rattler was now facing the sun. This confused it. It struck without caution and the force of its effort threw it full length beside the bull. Hardly had the long body thudded softly on the ground before the bull-snake saw the opportunity for which it had been waiting. Snapping for the rattler's head, it caught the other just at the neck and made a grip; but the rattler was too quick for it and flung it off.

By this time they were both plainly exhausted with the fury of the fight. They crawled away from each other gladly and lay glaring and hissing spitefully for fully ten minutes. They were gathering their strength for a last rally.

The rattler, though tired, had plenty of energy left; for a tiny field-mouse, deceived by the temporary quiet and peace, scurried by. Seeing its danger when it found itself directly in the path of the rattler, it hesitated the fraction of a second before flattening its tiny gray body to the ground. This hesitation cost the mouse its life, for the rattler darted out its vicious, flat head without the preparatory coil or the warning rattle. The frightened little creature gave a tiny squeak, bounced from the fangs of the snake and in less than ten minutes was a puffing and swollen heap.

Jim did not fancy the sight. Even a plainly exhausted rattlesnake was not a pleasant companion to look forward to spending the night with.

The mouse episode seemed to put new vigor into the rattler. As the bull-snake rippled out its full length of graceful body, the rattler eyed it eagerly, rattles pointing straight up and buzzing ominously. As the bull-snake approached cautiously the rattler sprang once more. The bull dodged and before the chagrined rattler could regain its balance the bull had it in the coveted hold on the back of the neck. Frantically the rattler endeavored to dislodge it. It knew what this hold, if unbroken, would mean.

Swinging to and fro—the bull-snake with a grip like a dog and the rattler thrashing about recklessly in a vain effort to throw it off—the climax of this long and bitterly contested battle began. Twice they passed almost over the body of Jim. Desperately as the rattler defended itself, the bull-snake slowly tightened its hold as its smooth, dull body slipped round by round over that of the twisting rattler. The dust was beaten and pounded into the air until it almost choked Jim. Now and then he could catch a glimpse of the starting, beady eyes of the rattler; but the grip of the bull-snake never once wavered.

Once or twice when the bull-snake seemed in danger of being thrashed from its hold on the rattler's neck, Jim rooted for it enthusiastically.

"Attaboy!" he shouted encouragingly. "Biff him another one—stay with it, old man—attaboy!"

Slowly the bull wound its coil about its enemy. The rattler bit viciously at the air but inch by inch the bull slipped almost its entire length about that of the diamond-back. The struggles of the rattler grew feebler and feebler. Occasionally there was a twist or a writhe; and as the sun dipped its last ray beneath the horizon, the snake lifted its head in one last, despairing effort to reach its enemy and fell back—an inert, crushed and helpless string of dead snake.

The sun had gone. The bull-snake lay motionless, wound about its enemy. Jim began to review the situation once more. He shivered as the dusk fell and he recalled that rattlesnakes generally traveled in pairs. He had no desire for a call from Mrs. Rattler during the night. The pain in his leg and wrist, which he had forgotten during the struggle, began again. The searching party must be started by this time. He tried to get at the holster beneath him to fire a shot for a signal.

He could not reach the gun. It lay directly under him, and his injured arm pained him at the least movement. He lifted his free hand to his mouth and cupped it like a miniature megaphone. With all his strength he shouted several times. The effort cost him much pain; but he continued for several moments.

As he raised his hand to his lips to shout again a crumble of dirt and grass-roots fell on his upturned face.

"Hey, old man," called a voice above, "hyare we are; what's happened to ye?"

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"Ringside seat at a rattling good bull-fight," called Jim cheerfully; "but handle me easy, boys; I think I'm broke in twenty places."

An improvised cradle of rope brought him to the top, where his story so interested the men that one of them returned to haul up the snakes for the entire party to gaze at. They gave first aid to the injured wrist and ankle and left the wrenched back until they reached the ranch-house.

"That there used to be called Rattlesnake Bluff," said one of the men as they rode slowly back. "It's plum full of the critters. I never did see many bull-snakes in this part of the country; but you sure did lit right down where Old Man Rattler lives, all right."

Jim shivered again as they rode on in the soft darkness. He was thinking of that frightened little field-mouse that tried to flatten itself in the dust.

HOW GONZALES PLAYED A "SAFETY"

BY HUGH THOMASON

DURING the war between Honduras and Nicaragua several years ago, I and several other foreign-born soldiers of fortune were serving with the Honduranians. We were serving under a colonel by the name of Gonzales, who had the honor of being hated by more men at the same time than any man I ever knew. Gonzales was as gun-shy as a setter pup that had been hunted over by a careless man. If Gonzales was caught by the first volley of the enemy they were lucky, as he certainly never was caught by the second.

He rode a mule called Francisco, which was almost as great a coward as his master. He knew that astride of Francisco he was safe in any fight, as Francisco would gallop madly to the rear, on hearing the crack of the first rifle.

One notable day—notable on account of the fact that it was the only time during the war that we ever whipped the Nicaraguans—we were marching through a piece of flat grass-land, when the enemy appeared on the edge of a wood about three hundred yards away on our front. As all ill-trained troops will do under such circumstances, our soldiers commenced to fire without command. The mule finding the fire coming from behind him ran toward the Nicaraguans despite the fact that his master was leaning back and sawing on the bit with all his strength. The enemy now opened fire and the amazed and utterly confounded mule came tearing back to us bearing his master with him. The Honduranians now returned the fire with interest, which started the mule in the other direction once again.

I was armed with a beautiful little Mauser carbine and had plenty of ammunition. I said to myself—

"I will get rid of this fellow, right now."

I kneeled and took a steady, deliberate aim at Gonzales as he rode straight away from me. I filled my sights and steadily pressed the trigger. At the crack of my carbine, he dived prettily forward to the ground on his face.

That night while lounging around the camp-fire, Albert Wehde, the Milwaukee German, called me to one side and said—"Did you see Gonzales fall to-day?"

"Yes," I answered. "Why?"

"Well, I got him. I have been laying off to get him for some time. We won't be bothered with him any more."

Then Martin Hyland took me to one side and told me how he had bumped Gonzales off of Francisco. Inside of thirty minutes five men took me to one side and told me how they had shot the colonel. Just then we heard some commotion at our neighboring camp-fire; Gonzales had returned.

It seems that just at the moment we had fired, Gonzales had played a "safety" by diving from his mule.

As Bobbie Burns says—

"The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men gang aft agley."

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MIS-DEAL by Ben F. Baker

WHEN two men, or four men, or a dozen, goes pardners, they ought to all be of one suite. A handful of one suite, properly played, jest nacher'lly forces the whole deck to come right home an' be good.

The jack of diamonds an' the queen of spades may be all right in matrimony, but the ace an' king of hearts has got 'em beat in every other game that's played.

Same with men.

There's them four misfits that prospects Tramway Bar in the Summer of '96. Each of 'em belonged to a different suite; nacher'lly they're in trouble all the time.

They put in a real interestin' Summer. After they get back to camp for the Winter, they tell me all about the whole trip; an' its a wonder to me they don't murder each other before they're out a week.

One of 'em is Irish; one's a Swede; there's a Dutchman an' a French-Canuck. All of 'em except "Curly" Rabideau speaks American jest as good as me or you; an', of course, that makes the Canuck set 'way back from the fire, right from the start.

The Irishman is all the time talkin'; the Swede wants to work all day an' most of the night; the Dutchman scares away all the game tryin' to sing. Don't ask me how they come to be pardners.

Anyway, they gopher around on Tramway all Summer an' don't strike nothin'. Then, one mornin' they wake up an' find ice in the coffee-pot. Next mornin' they're ready to strike out across country, aimin' to hit the Yukon at Rampart an' figgerin' to make it before the freeze-up. They estimate it's a ten-day trip an' they pack up grub accordin'.

Now this here Curly has got a pet dog which he's brought along from Circle. This here Gumbo dog is one of them long-haired malamutes that's like the bearded lady—no good except to look at.

'Course, the outfit don't want to be bothered with no dog on a packin' trip; but when Erickson proposes to cut the cards to see who'll bump Gumbo off with a .30-30, Curly goes right up in the air. He allows Gumbo goes along. So all hands sit around while Curly makes a pack-saddle out of a gunnysack an' loads Mr. Gumbo with twenty dry salmon—dog-feed for twenty days. The way the play comes up, Gumbo don't get them twenty fish—he don't get half of them.

The outfit waddles along, loaded pretty heavy, but makin' good time. Nothin' happens till the fourth day; then they strike Old John Creek. Soon as camp is made, Michael Joseph suggests that they take to the ridge next mornin' instead of followin' the creek bed; but the other three outvotes him. They claim the goin' ought to be pretty good, followin' up the gulch.

Next mornin', Michael advances the ridge idea again and gets outvoted some more. None of 'em knows the country; they figger it's safer to stick to the gulch right on up to her head and then drop over the divide into the headwaters of the Tozikakat. Once on the Tozi, they're safe; they all figger they know the Tozi country, clean into the Yukon.

But Michael Joseph won't listen to

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nobody—he's jest nacher'lly jackass stubborn. He talks an' talks; an' finally he declares they'll save half a day by takin' the ridge.

That gets 'em. When you're nursin' a big pack, half a day saved is all the same as buyin' a beer with your last dime an' gettin' a five-dollar gold-piece in change.

The goin' on the ridge was great, jest like Michael told 'em. Towards evenin' they drop into a gulch which Michael allows is a fork of the Tozi. His pals don't seem to recognize it, but Michael insists he knows right where he's at; so all hands goes to sleep with the comfortable feelin' that they're on home ground. They mush down this creek all next day and land on a bigger one towards dark; out of that one next day on to a river which Michael hails as the Tozi.

Next mornin' they mosey down this little river for a couple of hours when, all of a sudden, Erickson notices she's runnin' north and east.

The Tozi flows west and south!

Little things like rivers runnin' the wrong way ain't nothin' to Michael Joseph Ryan. He's right there, Johnny-at-the-rat-hole, with the statement that they're on a big bend and that pretty soon Mr. Tozi will quit foolin' and come back to the proper course.

He hands 'em the bull so fluent that he mighty near makes 'em believe he bent that river himself; so they mush on.

Come night, they break out on to a great, big river; and it takes jest two looks to tell 'em they're back on the Koyukuk!

They had dropped down from that first ridge into a pup of Old John Creek, worked into Old John and then followed her right down to the Koyukuk! Which skilful maneuverin' lands 'em farther from the Yukon than they was when they left Tramway.

"Ain't you the cute little cut-up?" Erickson throws at Michael Joseph, for a starter. "Say," he says, "your head's as solid as a chunk of ice. If I wasn't afraid of breakin' the handle I'd take a crack at you with the ax! But I'm goin' to hurt you some! I'm goin' to choke you to death! And I'm goin' to tear your head off! You don't need it, 'cause it ain't worth a —— nohow!"

"Don't you hurt him so bad he can't feel nothin'," Jan chips in. "Some of him belongs to me and I'm goin' to get it. I don't allow no yap to appoint himself the bell-mare and lead me off the trail without him gettin' a mark or two on him!"

Even meek little Curly is riled some.

"Save some of heem for me," he begs. "Hi'm goin' to keel a lil' beet, anyway."

Of course, when Michael finally gets in a word, he allows he's blameless.

"It ain't my fault," he yells, "but at that, I ain't goin' to argue with no boilin' lunatics like you-all. I took you up high, where you could enjoy the scenery and the higher feelin's—and now you're beefin'! We jest nacher'lly walked the wrong way—that's all. And you-all write this on your cuffs; you ain't goin' to pull off nothin' on me without me takin' a violent hand! I'm a mean hog and I don't care where I root!"

Well, the battle royal ends in a draw, with all hands plumb wrecked; but, some way, they're feelin' kinda contented. After lookin' each other over, they agree to start in even again; so they hold a powwow to decide where they put down their next bet.

Next mornin', they take their back track, with the Swede for a guide. As a pilot Michael Joseph has done busted his steerin'-gear.

THEY'VE got less than five days grub left; but they take the trail as game as a dog salmon, with the Dutchman and Curly workin' to one side a mile or so, tryin' for a moose. Did you ever notice how hard grub is to get when you plumb need it? 'Course, they don't have no luck—not even a rabbit.

That night, they relieve Gumbo of his pack-saddle of fish, arguin' it ain't fair for him to pack them any more since he's goin' to quit eatin' from then on. They agree on one meal a day with dry salmon for breakfast and supper; and that's all they get durin' five days more of steady mushin'.

Then they're plumb out of the grub zone. They're as clean as a jay-bird! At the end of the second day without grub, they're about all in; so they go to searchin' their packs for one more bite.

The Dutchman is usin' a pair of overalls for pack-straps and he gets to feelin' in the pockets like maybe he'll find a sack of flour or something. And what do 'spose he does find? A smashed-up package of

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yeast cakes—a dozen little cakes made out of cornmeal! They look as big as weddin' cakes! Them poor wahoos gets so excited, they agree to save 'em for breakfast and start out on a full stomach!

Now listen. Soon as all hands has rolled in, the Dutchman gets to figgerin'. He dopes it out that he's got prior rights through bein' the discoverer. So he licks up the whole twelve of them yeast cakes as soon as his buddies get to sleep.

Right away trouble! In less than an hour, the Dutchman goes to raisin'—he jest nacher'lly swells up like a poisoned pup! It ain't long till he starts yellin'; also, by this time, he's as light and feathery as a balloon.

The gang gets scared and proceeds to set on him to keep him from sailin' away. And they hold a meetin' on him for stealin'. The verdict is unanimous; he's to get beat up, nice and tender, as soon as he quits yellin'.

But he fools 'em. He don't quit. He jest whoops her up, steady and continuous—and keeps right on raisin'.

This here swellin' stunt brings Jan a little luck 'cause his buddies forgets about beatin' him up and goes to makin' finger bets on when he'll bust. Pretty soon Michael Joseph owes the Swede seven hundred dollars unless the Dutchman explodes before midnight. And they're enjoyin' the concert immense.

Except Gumbo. Gumbo's nerves don't seem to be strong nohow, 'cause it ain't long till the poor old malamute lets out one long, drizzlin' howl and departs for the tall and uncut, same like he'd been tin-canned. Maybe he was nervous and touchy, that way, 'count of not eatin' nothin' for a few days.

Jan is some better next mornin' so they hit the trail again, with Gumbo loafin' along behind, watchin' the Dutchman steady and prepared to leave for keeps the first time Jan makes a funny move.

Two more days of stumblin' along with nary a bite; and then, that night, they have a full feed of meat!

Gumbo? Sure! They scoffed him!

ONE evenin', towards the end of October, I go down to the river for a couple of buckets of water and find the old girl about ready to jam; mush-ice from bank to bank. While I was standin' there, wonderin' what I would do if I had a mile of that ice in New York, I hear a hail from the other side.

There's a bunch of maniacs over there, makin' signs that they want to come across. I jest nacher'lly let 'em holler and wave. It ain't up to me to cross that ditch, in that ice. After I get on top the bank, I take another look and they're still at it. They act like they're goin' crazy. So I go over to the store and borrow a pair of glasses. Sure. It was them, standin' as close to the water as they could get and wavin' and jumpin' around somethin' fierce!

It's half an hour before I can find any one crazy enough to make the trip; but finally Hank Sommers allows he'll take a chance. We make a dozen tries before we get a boat launched; when we do get away, we sure get a run for our money. We was squeezed, jammed, whirled around, half-swamped, throwed bodily on top the ice and generally manhandled for more'n an hour; and when we hit the other bank, we was two miles down-stream!

But we had a good boat and there was two mighty good men in it.

Them wahoos runs down the bank as we drifts and the minute we lands, they swarms all over us.

As usual, Michael Joseph antes first.

"Have you got anything to eat?" he screeches.

"Eat!" I says. "Say, do you think we come over here on a boatin' picnic and brought our lunch along?"

"Well, then, gimme a chew, quick!" he says.

I hand him my plug; he bites off a chew and swallers it! When he starts on the second bite, I jump in and fight it away from him. He sure was hungry.

There wasn't clothes enough on that whole outfit to make a pair of pants for a hummin'-bird. Tearin' through the bush day after day, lost and starvin' and loco, had reduced their raiment to a collection of rips and tears held together by a few tatters. They was wearin' the very last word in open-work patterns. They wasn't decent! But we pile 'em into the boat, and with all that extra weight, believe me, we have one more trip goin' back.

Them locoes never paid no mind to nothin'—jest started talkin' about grub and what they was goin' to eat and askin'

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how many restaurants was runnin' and was there any fresh spuds in camp?

We make a landin' four miles below town; and the minute we hit the bank, out they tumble and start up the beach on a run. They don't run far—they're too weak.

When we get to town they pile into Chancey's restaurant and start hollerin' for grub. Order every blamed thing they see and some things they don't see and that fool Chancey starts to serve 'em. Starts 'em off with some canned tripe!

It takes half the town to hold 'em while I run over to the Mirror and get four tumblers of canned milk and hootch. Milk and hootch is a mighty pleasin' combination and I figger it jest nacher'lly fits anybody; but I'm wrong. Every blamed one of them skunks lets go of that soothin' balm before it's half-way down. Wastin' them good concentrates that way don't make no hit with me.

We try 'em on everything from dried cabbage to salt salmon; but it's no go—everything goes the same way as the milk and frumenti.

About midnight we give up and yank 'em over to Sinclair's cabin where a committee of six is appointed to feed 'em soup, gradual.

The first day they're allowed down-town, Erickson and Jan meets me in the store. They call me aside and allow they've got a dispute with Curly; but they're willin' to arbitrate and will I act as referee? They say Michael Joseph and Curly has already agreed on me and that they're waitin'; so we mush over to their cabin, shut the door and I tell 'em to cut loose.

"Any time I go pardners with a man, we're pardners," Erickson leads off. "Is that correct?"

"Sure. That's the law of the land," I reply.

"All right then," says the Swede. "When us four started on that Koyukuk trip, we was pardners till the trip was finished, wasn't we?"

"You nacher'lly had to be," I says. "Go on."

"All right then," he says. "Now, if you and me is pardners and you got some grub, an equal share of that grub is mine, ain't it?" he asks. "Or anything else you got is equally mine, ain't it?"

"Who's foolish enough to dispute it?" I want to know. "Tell your tale."

"I'm doin' it," he says. "Now, when us four gets to the point where we've plumb got to eat, why we jest nacher'lly eat—that's all there is to it. I'm jest as sorry as I can be that we had to lick up poor old Gumbo, and I'm tellin' you the honest truth when I say that I didn't relish him near as much as lots of meat I've eat. Why, thinkin' of eatin' that poor, old malamute makes me sicker'n —— to my stomach, right now. I'm jest as soft-hearted as anybody you ever see; but what I'm tryin' to tell you—we had to eat!"

"Well, you eat, didn't you," I says. "What you gettin' at, anyway?"

"Maybe you won't believe me," says the Swede, "but that sap-headed Frenchman wants each of us to pay him for one-fourth of that dog!"

What do you know about that?

"Talk," I says to Curly. "Quick."

"He, I got notting to talk," says the Canuck. "I make dese pardnaire fair bisneess propseeshun. Dese dog, he's belong to me. I take him on dat treep for one pet and he doan' belong on de houtfeet. He's on de houtside—only to me, he's belong. Dese pardnaire and me, we eat dat Gombo. I eat, maybe, my share. I doan know—I'm too hongry dat time for fine out. Anyway, four man, four share—one man, one share. Dese pardnaire, if he's play fair, he's pay me for t'ree share of dat Gombo. I buy heem las' Spreeng for forty dollaire and I count heem all out—ten dollaire for one share. Pay me," he demands.

Nobody don't say nothin' for a long time. Me, I feel like somebody has hit me in the head with a big rock. After a while, I sort of float back to earth; at the same time, I get an idea.

"You four eats this here Gumbo malamute," I says. "This here dog don't belong to the outfit; he's Curly's personal property. None of you objects when Curly so states. Therefore, while this is the foolishest deal I ever hear tell of, Curly has got a case.

"You three pays him ten dollars each; then you take him out, one at a time, and you give him a trimmin' that'll make him think that Gumbo was worth four million dollars. Court's closed."

"Not with me it ain't!" yells the Dutchman. "Say, you're locoed wors'n this cayuse Frenchman. I ain't never paid

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no pardner for nothin' I ever eat yet, on no trip; and you can bet the check-rack I don't go nowheres and starve and then dig up ten dollars to nobody for a measly chunk of dog meat! More'n that, I never eat no more'n fifteen cents worth of his blame dog, nohow! I don't like dog! I appeal!" he hollers.

"There ain't goin' to be no appeal," I state, calm and collected. "You half-baked clams take up my time with this fool case; you get me to set in and decide a regular Siwash squabble—squaw squabble, at that; and now you're goin' to accept my rulin'. This here is the Supreme Court and no appeal goes. You do what I said in this case, or I call a meetin' on you for refusin' to abide by the rulin' of a court of arbitration."

That stops 'em, dead. They sure don't want to advertise that case before no miners' meetin'.

Bye and bye, everybody but me and Curly goes out. They stop right outside the door and go to talkin'. Me and Curly sets there a long while, with Curly gettin' more restless every minute; but I guess he figgers it's comin' anyway for pretty soon he steps outside.

The Irishman gets him first; then the Dutchman; the Swede takes the leavins'. What they do to him won't never do to tell, but I figger justice has done been satisfied when the Swede tries to eat all the meat off the back of the Frenchman's neck; so I step in with a pail of water and stop the show. Then they hand Curley a ten-spot apiece and leave him with thirty dollars and a face like one of them purple, foggy sunsets.

IT LOOKS to me like this scrap settles the Gumbo Case for keeps; but not yet. Next mornin', bright and early, the Swede blows in and invites me to dinner. Them locoes has made up and a big rabbit dinner is decided on as the outward and visible sign of peace and good-will. The feed is set for noon; but at ten o'clock along comes the Dutchman and unloads.

"This here peace feast is phony, so I blow down ahead of time, to put you next, so's you don't get sore," says he. "The rabbit stew is on the square; but there's another stew that's crooked. This mornin' I buys two pots, all the same alike. Into one of them pots goes the rabbit stew. Into the other pot goes a white pup which Michael Joseph buys up to the Siwash camp. This here pup is jest demised when Michael sees it—a squaw is startin to skin it for mocassin trimmin's, or somethin'.

"Here's the idea. Michael skins the pup, all but the last joint of a hind leg—that's to prove it's dog. Michael is goin' to cook and wait on the table to prevent any slip-up. Now listen, good. Every time the Frenchman wants a helpin', Michael passes the pup pot; every time any of the rest of us holler, Michael passes the rabbit pot.

"We done figgered it out. Eatin' dog when you're starvin' is pretty tough; but eatin' dog when you're well-fed is ruinous! Curly don't suspicion nothin' till he finds that foot on his plate—then he's got dog enough to last him till the Big Freeze-up. The camp hears all about it before night and we get revenge and the winner's end. You comin'?"

Believe me, I was there early. There ain't nobody at home except Michael Joseph, who's fussin' around the stove with his twin pots, smilin' like a lynx.

Also, he's got a bottle of three-star. Me and him ain't hardly had more'n three or four apiece when in comes the rest of the family. Right away, the cook announces dinner and we draw up. Everybody seems to be feelin' happy, not to say hilarious, especially Michael Joseph, who is hittin' his three-star every time he thinks of it. And his thought is mighty near one continuous flow.

Frenchy gets helped first, Michael holdin' the pot while the Canuck ladles himself a panful. Then Michael allows the handle is hot and he takes the pot back to the stove and says he is goin' for a rag. That's when he switches pots.

The rest of us get helped out of the second pot and we all start in; and I want to tell you, she sure was an elegant mess. I sure got to hand it to Michael—he was some chef. We all enjoy that dinner fine—it was immense.

It don't take no time at all for us to mop up and begin hollerin' for more. So Michael goes for the feed and this time he fixes it so's he'll reach Curly last. Just before he serves the Frenchman, Michael toddles back to the stove for his rag, workin' the hot-pot gag once more.

Soon as Curly has ladled his panful from

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the changed pot Michael brings him, the Irishman tips us the wink that the buck has done been passed!

Frenchy wades right in; he's mighty near the bottom of his pan, when, all of a sudden, the Dutchman lets out a yell that jars the ridge-log!

We quit watchin' the Frenchman immediate and turn to Jan to see what in thunder is wrong with him. The Dutchman is sittin' there, pale as a ghost, a-starin' at his plate plumb pop-eyed!

And what he's a-starin' at is a little, white, furry foot!

SITTING BULL NOT IN THE CUSTER FIGHT

BY E. A. BRININSTOOL

IT IS generally supposed by people who have but slight knowledge of the battle of the Little Big Horn, or "Custer's last fight," as it is better known, that Sitting Bull, the powerful medicine-man of the Unkpapa Sioux, was the real leader of and the moving spirit in that historic slaughter. Such, however, is far from the case.

Sitting Bull was not a war-chief. He was a medicine-man in whose mystic charms and incantations the Sioux had great faith. He had the entire Sioux nation "buffaloed," to use a popular expression, and Sitting Bull was crafty and shrewd enough to work his weird superstitions and beliefs to the limit.

The great medicine-man was in the big Sioux village along the Little Big Horn on that twenty-fifth of June, 1876, when Custer's men rode toward the Indian encampment. Some days previously he had prophesied that a terrific battle would soon take place between the Indians and the white soldiers, and that the Indians would score a great victory. Strangely enough, this part of Sitting Bull's prediction came true, but the wily medicine-man took no part in the fight.

The Sioux encampment attacked by Custer and the Seventh Cavalry contained close to fifteen thousand souls, of whom somewhere between three thousand five hundred and four thousand were warriors. It was the largest Indian camp ever assembled on the American continent, and was strung out along the banks of the Little Big Horn to a length of nearly four miles, while thousands and thousands of ponies grazed on the outskirts of the village.

Sitting Bull's family, consisting of his two wives and several children, occupied two teepees in the Unkpapa camp. The morning of the fight the medicine-man had informed the people that he would remain n his lodge making medicine, and when the bullets from Reno's contingent began whistling through the teepee-poles in the neighborhood of the camp occupied by Sitting Bull and his family, consternation reigned. Reno's attack at the upper end of the camp created a panic in the heart of the great Sioux necromancer. It so happened that his ponies were handy, and he lost no time in getting his family together and making a break straight for the hills opposite to where the attack was made.

Unfortunately for the reputation of Sitting Bull, his going was so sudden that he forgot one of his twin sons, who was left behind in the rapid flight, entirely forgotten. He heard behind him the roar of battle, and he kept right on "hitting the trail" until he had placed a good ten miles between himself and the battle-field, and undoubtedly would have continued his flight had he not been overtaken by a courier from the camp, who informed him of the annihilation of the Custer contingent.

Thereupon Sitting Bull showed his crafty nature again. He returned at once to the victorious encampment, where he arrogantly announced that all the credit for the victory belonged to him, stating that during the engagement he had been in the hills overlooking the fight, making medicine and invoking the gods of war to give the Sioux a wonderful victory over the white soldiers. Astounding as it may seem, most of the Sioux sided in with Sitting Bull, crediting him with "heap big medicine," and Chiefs Gall, Crow King and Crazy Horse, the prime factors among the Sioux, who were the real leaders in the battle, were not given the credit they really had won.

Thus it was that Sitting Bull was given popular approval as the annihilator of Custer. But the great war-chiefs ever held him in contempt after the Custer affair, and he never regained the prestige he had heretofore held.

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LEETE PROTESTS

A Complete Novelette

by Russell A. Boggs

Author of "Circular 473," "The Cool Hand," etc.

WHEN Jimmy Leete locked his depot and departed for his lodgings, on Tuesday evening, he had his accounts and station work generally cleared up and in as good shape as he could recall their ever having been. In fact, he could not recall a time when his accounts and other work had been in so satisfactory a condition; which is saying something, for Jimmy Leete had been the agent at Tipton for the P. G. & L. for the past ten years.

He looked forward with relief to a comparatively easy day on the morrow. Doubtless he could get his daily reports off his hands by noon; that would give him the afternoon in which to relax a little and take things easy while clearing up a few small odd items. It would be a welcome change from the steady plugging he'd been doing.

When Jimmy Leete arose at six o'clock on Wednesday morning he discovered that it was raining—a steady, warm rain that seemed to drop straight down from an unbroken, low-hanging leaden sky—the kind of steady, warm rain that so frequently keeps falling the day long. Jimmy Leete should have been warned by the downpour. In all the years of his agenting never had there been a rainy day which was not a busy day—a particularly busy day. Business seemed to thrive in wet weather.

But the agent at Tipton was not warned. Optimistically he looked forward to a pleasant Wednesday. He'd always had a sort of longing for a drizzly day on which he could sit in his little office, largely at ease, and drowsily watch the raindrops pattering down outside while the telegraph sounders buzzed sleepily in his ears. Perhaps this would be that day, he reflected—seeing that he had his affairs in such promising shape.

Breakfast over, he hurried to the station, where he was due at 7 A.M. He reached the depot just in time to see the drayman drive up beside the baggage truck with five large drummer's trunks on his wagon. The drayman looked out dejectedly from the shelter of his big yellow umbrella.

"These're for the seven-twenty-seven," he called to Jimmy. "Want 'em on the truck?"

Jimmy regarded the heavy trunks apathetically. Probably it was then that he had his first suspicion that the day was not going to go well.

"Yes," he told the drayman. "Put 'em on, Sam."

He unlocked his waiting-room doors and the office door, put his dripping umbrella in a corner, pulled on an old rain-coat, went to the freight house and hauled out a canvas tarpaulin, dragged it down to the baggage truck and spread it over the trunks which Sam had deposited thereon.

A breezy drummer with a slightly Semetic accent—he to whom the five trunks belonged—arrived at the ticket window at seven-twenty-four. The train,

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as has been said, was due at seven-twenty-seven, and this morning it was right on time. Nevertheless, by strenuous effort the expert Jimmy managed to fill out the excess and other checks, enter the numbers on a baggage waybill, attach the checks to the trunks and get them all safely off on the train.

He betrayed no irritation while he hurried and while the complacent, plump little drummer accepted his efforts all as a matter of course. Jimmy was too old an agent to reveal any vexation he may have felt over the drummer's tardiness in arriving; nor did he trouble to advise the drummer that the three-minute margin was so small that he, Jimmy, would have been fully justified in allowing the trunks to lay over and go out on a later train. Pride in his ability prevented any mention or pursuing of that course.

The seven-twenty-seven left two pouches of mail. Jimmy patiently shouldered them, trudged to the post-office located on the main street, three squares away, and then retraced his steps to the depot.

In his office once more, he removed his soaked rain-coat and hung it over a chair. While doing this he heard some wagons drive up to the rear freight house door; and a moment later a man's head appeared at the open ticket window.

"Got some household goods out here," announced the man at the window. "Where you want 'em?"

Jimmy Leete smothered a groan. Household goods—the station agent's delight—and not an empty box car on the siding. Jimmy realized, right there, that this was going to be a poor day.

"How much?" asked Jimmy weakly.

"Three load," responded the other.

The agent smothered another and more heartfelt groan. He limply reached for his pad of bills-of-lading.

"Put 'em in the freight house," he instructed the man.

It required just one hour for Jimmy to get the household-goods items entered on the bill-of-lading. When the job was completed the greater part of the small freight house was packed to the rafters with the various articles—chairs, beds, boxes, barrels, tables—everything. The freight charges calculated and settled, the teamsters drove off and the agent set himself to waybilling the shipment. That required ten minutes more; and just as he took the waybill from the press the eastbound local freight train pulled in.

Jimmy threw open the freight house door that faced the main line tracks. The conductor of the local handed him a bunch of waybills.

"A little of everything for you this morning, Jimmy," proclaimed the conductor cheerfully.

He grinned under his dripping rubber hat; it pleases the average local trainman when he can deluge an agent with freight.

"Stick it right in," responded Jimmy impassively. "Pile 'er up to the roof at this end. Then, when you're through unloading, I've got something for you."

"What's that?" demanded the conductor quickly.

"Oh, a little flittin'," returned Jimmy gently.

The conductor glanced through the freight house door at the ominous array of household articles.

"What! All that?" he cried. He glared fiercely at the agent. "I ain't got a car to put it in!" he wailed.

The agent cast an undisturbed eye at the conductor's train.

"Seems to me I see a couple empty box cars right out there," he said, pointing to some cars opposite the freight house.

The conductor gave up his attempt at evasion. He swore in deep disgust.

"Oh, all right," he growled. "We'll take it." Then he suddenly grinned again at Jimmy—a revengeful, pleased, evil grin. "I guess you'll get yours today, anyhow. Company's coming."

"Company?" repeated Jimmy.

"Yes, company," declared the conductor. He looked back toward the caboose. "Look what I brought you. Picked 'em up at Boydstown this morning."

Jimmy Leete looked. Nearing the station, coming from the rear of the train, was a hitherto-unperceived group of four men, each with a neat little black grip in his hand. One glance was enough for the surprized Jimmy. He knew them—Irwin, the express route agent; Griswold, the car-service man; Braden, the traveling auditor; and Peelman, the division supervisor of stations.

"I'll be blowed!" murmured Jimmy faintly. "We're sure going to have a party!"

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"Party is right," replied the conductor. "There'll be —— to pay when that bunch turns loose on you."

"Isn't it the truth, John?" breathed Jimmy. "Isn't it the truth?"

This day, of a certainty, was spoiled.

From the approaching four Leete once more glanced at the conductor for a parting word.

"But don't you let it worry you any," directed Jimmy, pulling himself together. "That bunch can't scare me any. No, sir; not even one little bit. I don't owe any of 'em any money!"

The conductor laughed.

"You're welcome to 'em! Go to it, Jimmy!"

"I'll go!" promised Tipton's agent.

II

WEDNESDAY proved to be a hard day for Jimmy Leete; of that there is no question. Rather, up until about three o'clock in the afternoon it was hard; and then there had been a change.

One after the other the four inspectors—as they might be, and usually were, designated—had taken their turn in firing questions and reproof at the Tipton agent. They called for this book and that book, this record and that record.

They desired to know if he did this or if he did that. If he did, why did he; and if he did not, why did he not; and in any case they usually proclaimed him wrong. His methods and practices, it seems, were not altogether correct and proper; they might be nearly right—but always there appeared to be some flaw—or at least what the four were pleased to call a flaw.

With great good patience Jimmy Leete answered questions and dug out all desired records. He listened meekly while his errors were thrust baldly at him; he accepted reproofs without comment—and the reproofs were many. But underneath his patience and forbearance Jimmy was thinking. There was something wrong here, he kept reflecting. This petulance, this crabbed way in which the inspectors prodded at him, was not right.

It was no new thing to him; he'd endured it for a good many years. The overemphasis on insignificant trifles was a part of the inspectors' methods, he realized. Also, he knew that at every station they visited their procedure was the same; the inspectors regarded it all as the proper way in which to fulfil the functions of their several positions.

But their methods were wrong, Jimmy kept cogitating. He kept puzzling over it while he went to lunch, and after his return from lunch. The thing that was wrong kept elusively flitting just beyond the reaches of his brain, kept evading him persistently. Up until about three o'clock, that is; then he grasped it.

The car-service man had finished with the agent, and the express route agent and the traveling auditor. Underneath his apparent meekness the agent at Tipton had gradually steeled his heart and feelings. A kind of absent, cold vexation had filled him—vexation at the inspectors' petulance. Without being at all egotistical he knew that conditions at his station were close to being A1—were better than would be found at ninety per cent. of the stations on the division.

The last man to have his innings with Jimmy Leete was the division supervisor of stations, Peelman—a small, birdlike man, sharp-faced and sharp-eyed, whose forehead bulged out and whose chin bulged in. Since morning the supervisor had been snooping around, pecking through desks and cupboards, through record-books, in corners inside and corners outside. The drizzling rain seemingly had not the slightest effect on him.

At two-thirty Peelman had asked for the expense bills, and with them in hand had gone alone out to the freight house. At two-forty-five Peelman hastened back into the office where the agent and the three other inspectors were. Peelman was primed for action; that much would have been discernible to the most superficial observer; indignation quivered in the supervisor's very nostrils.

"Out in the freight house I've found an unclaimed, damaged wheelbarrow," burst forth Peelman, confronting the Tipton agent. "An unclaimed wheelbarrow that should have gone to the unclaimed warehouse three days ago!"

He glowered accusingly at Jimmy Leete.

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy meekly.

"Don't you know that unclaimed freight must not stay in your freight house over ninety days—that at the end of that time it must be forwarded to the unclaimed warehouse for disposal?"

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"Yes, sir," said Jimmy again.

"Then for heaven's sake," exploded Peelman, "send it there! Don't let things lie around like that! You see that the wheelbarrow is forwarded, tomorrow."

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy once again.

The properly indignant supervisor slapped the bunch of expense bills down on the desk beside him. He had finished his inspecting, but still had two other grievances to take up with the agent. He now proceeded to make the most of them.

"Another thing," announced Peelman.

He stretched out his right arm, with something of a gesture, and pointed dramatically at the two windows at the rear of the office.

"Just look at those windows," directed the supervisor in a pained, deeply sad voice. "Do you call that any condition in which to keep windows?"

The extremely dramatic gesture and the deep pathos of the words had caused the other inspectors to glance around at Jimmy Leete and the windows toward which Peelman's right arm extended so rigidly.

"No, sir," said Jimmy.

His face and eyes were stolid, utterly impassive. The two windows were dirty, beyond the shadow of a doubt—particularly the upper sash of each, which was covered and blackened with grime and smoke till its appearance was decidedly hazy. Apparently there was no chance for argument on the agent's part.

A gleam of triumph flashed in the supervisor's eyes.

"Then clean 'em up!" he ordered, snappily. "Wash them—and keep them washed!"

There yet remained the third, and last, grievance and Peelman, puffed up by his two knock-downs, swept on to the third. He felt he had the agent groggy and figured on making the third a knock-out. With a sweeping motion Peelman's dramatic arm swerved from the windows; his rigid index-finger aimed at a bunch of tariffs on the agent's desk.

It was a small bunch of blue-backed and gray-backed and green-backed and white-backed tariffs, all neatly piled up on a corner of the desk. The total thickness of the bunch was perhaps four inches and in it there may have been twenty tariffs; certainly there were no more.

"Those unfiled tariffs," declaimed the supervisor. "Look at them!"

Jimmy and the three other inspectors looked. But Jimmy this time said nothing.

"Those tariffs should not be there," went on Peelman, seeing that Jimmy spoke no word. "They should be in your tariff case, filed in the drawers in proper order. Don't you know that?"

The patient agent answered this time.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Then file them!" exclaimed Supervisor Peelman. His tone indicated that his own patience had been stretched to about the limit. "File them, or the first thing you know some Government tariff inspectors will come along and find them and then they'll paste a big fine on you. Haven't you read the penalty for not filing your tariffs?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy. He appeared to consider the matter for a second. Then he ventured timidly, "Do you s'pose they'd really do it?"

"Fine you? Why, most assuredly they would. They'd do it quick as a wink!"

TIPTON'S agent shook his head in gentle wonder.

"They'd fine an agent some odd thousands of dollars if he fails to file his tariffs." His words were almost as if he spoke aloud to himself only. "Some-odd thousands. Just think of that. An agent! Now wherever would the poor man get the money?"

He looked up, his eyes seeking Peelman as if he sought more enlightenment.

"And I s'pose if the agent couldn't pay the fine he'd have to go to jail for some-odd years?" he asked, still timorously.

"Surest thing you know!" answered Peelman, mercilessly.

He felt that he was making a great impression on this agent.

Jimmy waggled his head sadly.

"Just think of that," he observed. "Have to go to jail—have to wear stripes and pound rocks."

He was silent in gloomy meditation before he again looked up. When he did so there was a sudden new ray of hope in his eyes.

"But they'd feed a fellow, wouldn't they?" he half-eagerly inquired of the supervisor. "In jail, I mean—if they sent him there?"

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For an instant Peelman seemed a bit surprized at the simple childishness of the question.

"Oh, yes, they'd feed him all right," he replied, pityingly—the pity of the strong man for the worm under his heel.

"Then do you know," flashed Jimmy, a sudden wide grin wrinkling his face, "do you know that then jail wouldn't seem so bad to a poor agent! Not if he got board and a place to sleep. Jail couldn't be a whole lot worse than this!"

All the meekness, all the timidity and humility abruptly dropped from Jimmy Leete as the smile spread over his face. Erect and entirely at ease he confronted them, the transformation taking place as swiftly as a quick-change artist transfers himself from old clothes to new. In his eyes was the light of complete self-possession, the gleam that shines in the eyes of the man who is sure of himself.

A sort of gasp went up from the four inspectors—a gasp of astonishment, as if they had but just heard some blasphemy.

"How's that?" ejaculated Peelman. "What's that you say?"

"I say," said Jimmy Leete, "that being in jail wouldn't be any worse than being agent here on some days. In fact, on these special days jail looks pretty soft. Why, gosh-dang it all, you bet!" He squared himself off in front of the incredulous, gasping inspectors. "Say, look-a-here, you fellows, I'm going to tell you something—something that'll maybe be rough and unpleasant, but nevertheless true. I've been doing some thinking, right here today, and I'm going to tell you all about it.

"I'm going to concentrate on you, Peelman. You'll have to serve as my particular case-in-point. But I'll not say that I have any particular hard feelings against you—not against you any more than any of the others here. To show just how impartial I am I'll be perfectly frank and state right here at the beginning that all four of you give me a large-sized pain in the midriff.

"Why? Why, just because the whole bunch of you are so darned stupidly intolerant—petulant and spoiled as some only child. Look at that wheelbarrow you spoke about, Peelman. I'll tell you about that. I'd just about persuaded the consignee to accept the broken thing, have the damage repaired and put in a claim for what the repairs actually cost.

"The repairs would amount to about a dollar; it wouldn't be more, I'm sure. All right for that, then. But s'pose I'd sent it to the unclaimed warehouse. There it'd most likely lie around for a while and then finally be sold—if sold at all—for a mere song; say fifty cents. In the meantime the big wholesale company who shipped the barrow has furnished the consignee with a duplicate and put in a claim for the total value of the refused wheelbarrow; and the freight claim department, not wishing to offend a big shipper and patron, pays the full claim; say five dollars.

"So there it is. You can figure out for yourself that if I'd get the consignee to accept the wheelbarrow—and I most assuredly would have done it within the next few days—it'd cost the railroad company about a dollar. Otherwise, roughly figuring, it'd cost 'em around five dollars. Maybe the saving wouldn't be much in itself; but multiplied often enough the case would amount to something.

"Therefore it seemed to me that stretching the ninety-day rule for a wee bit wouldn't hurt. But do you see it that way? No, sir! To your narrow, squeaky soul a rule is a rule—and no offense meant. Do you give me a chance to explain before you jump all over me? You don't."

Peelman's face had turned several colors—white, red, purple. Just now it was the latter.

"And that's not all," progressed Jimmy steadily. "Take them two windows. Just yesterday there was a helper engine came in on the spur back of the station here and stopped with the smoke-stack right opposite the windows.

"After the engine had been there for a few minutes I thought that the smoke was coming out pretty thick. So I peeked out; and there was the fireman, grinning all over his face to see what a good job he was making of darkening my two windows. As there wasn't any sun eclipse due I decided I didn't want my windows darkened. So I went out and I spoke to that fireman."

"Well," spluttered Peelman as Leete paused. "Well, what engine was it? Who was the fireman?"

Jimmy smiled tolerantly.

"I expected you to ask those questions, Peelman. But I'll tell you neither the

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engine number nor the fireman's name. When I need any assistance to attend to a case like that I'll let you know."

Jimmy smiled reminiscently. He'd surely mishandled that fireman to a frazzle. With the fireman's own greasy waste Jimmy had polished the cuprit's face to an ignominious smear.

"Yes, sir," continued the agent. "I attended to that fire-boy. He'll not be figuring much on darkening my windows again. Not him. And I'll tell you why I haven't cleaned the windows since. The fireman promised to lay off Thursday and come out and clean 'em for me. That's tomorrow, and he'll be here; I'll promise you that. I never saw a man who showed stronger signs of meaning what he said than that fire-boy when he promised me he'd come.

"But did you exhibit any desire to let me advance a possible excuse when you landed on me about the windows, Peelman? Yes—you didn't."

The supervisor's face by now had gone back to red. But Tipton's agent was not yet finished.

"And now about those tariffs," said Jimmy Leete. "It's simple about them. They were delayed somewhere—probably got mixed up with some other station's train mail. I only received them yesterday afternoon. If you'd looked in my tariff book, Mr. Supervisor, you'd have seen that I have all those tariffs on the desk listed—I. C. C. numbers, date received and all; and if you'd looked at the tariffs themselves real close you'd have seen they are arranged in numerical order, all ready to file in the drawers—which filing I was going to do this afternoon. I'd been figuring on a good day this Wednesday; and here it's been a poor day—one of the darndest poorest days I've ever seen!

"WHY, gosh-dang it all," cried Jimmy Leete, summing up, "you fellows pretty near make me real mad! You've all got the wrong idea. Your system is rotten as ——. You don't work with us agents—and that's the secret of the whole business! You work to get something on us; you work at us, and in effect you work against us!

"Why in the name of Tophet don't you try something new? This bulldozing stuff that you all keep trying to pull off on the boys is old stuff—old and worn and gray. Judas Priest! If I were an inspector I'd hate the darndest to know that when an agent sees me coming he feels like committing aggravated assault and battery, and that when I leave he feels like doing complete murder. Maybe you don't realize that that's the way most agents feel about you; but it is, and you can bet your last lead pencil on it.

"By hokey, if I were an inspector I'd want to help out the boys! I'd want to do my job so that I'd know they were genuinely glad when I called on 'em; I'd want to try and help make their job easier for 'em and I'd want them to know and really believe it. Work with them, not against them. That's the idea, gentlemen all!"

"Really," protested Peelman stutteringly, "this is—this is most extraordinary!"

"Extraordinary? You bet!" exclaimed Jimmy Leete. "And it's going to be more extraordinary yet!"

He looked at Braden, the traveling auditor.

"Have you finished with my accounts?"

"I have," replied Braden, obviously a little at a loss.

"How much cash on hand should I have to make the accounts stand in balance?"

"Eleven dollars and three cents," stated Braden, consulting a sheet.

The agent opened one of two cash drawers beneath the ticket window counter. He counted the money in it.

"Correct," stated Jimmy Leete then. "You'll find that amount in here, exactly."

He looked at the express route agent.

"How do I stand with you?" he asked Irwin.

"O. K.," replied Irwin, "providing you have twenty dollars and seventy-one cents on hand."

Jimmy opened the second cash drawer. He counted the money in it.

"Right-o," announced Jimmy. "That's what is here."

He shut the two drawers, locked them both with keys among a bunch that he took from a pocket; then he laid the keys on the counter beside him and once more faced the group.

"You see," said Jimmy Leete to them, "I'm going to leave you; right here and now, this afternoon."

"Going to leave!" cried Peelman.

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His words were echoed by the others.

"Going to leave," repeated Jimmy, calmly nodding his head. "Now's a good time. Everything is in balance and ready. I'll turn the keys and all over to you, Braden; I'll just appoint you acting-agent, so to speak."

"But—but—" stammered the traveling auditor in surprize.

"It'll save a lot of fussing some other day—save doing all this work over again to make another transfer," persisted Jimmy placidly. "I'm a-going, and that's all there is to it. You fellows have worked me up to just the right mood—and don't you try to stop me now! My leaving is to be my protest against the system you men follow in your work. Maybe my going doesn't amount to much and maybe it'll not have much weight. But I'll have the satisfaction of knowing that I've done it—that at least one protest has been made."

"But this is most unusual!" burst in Peelman excitedly. "This way of leaving—it'll be held against you!"

Jimmy Leete regarded the supervisor with a half-scornful, half-amused expression.

"Peelman," said Jimmy evenly, "I just knew that you'd say something like that; it was so true to type."

Jimmy held his two hands aloft. They were big hands—sinewy and capable-looking, made so by much handling of heavy freight.

"See these, Peelman? Don't you ever make the mistake of trying to intimidate a man with a pair of hands like this."

Leete dropped his hands. Without more ado he sat down at the telegraph desk in the office, the four inspectors staring at him in a baffled sort of way. He drew a pad to him and wrote a message; then he opened the key of his message wire and called the division office at Clay Junction; and when the operator there had answered Jimmy sent the message he had written. It was as follows:

Tipton
April 30th

SUPT. DERMOTT
Clay Jct.

Please accept this wire as my resignation as agent at Tipton effective this P.M. Am turning station and accounts over to Traveling Auditor Braden. If more or full details are desired inquire of Division Supervisor of Stations Peelman.

JAMES LEETE.

The operator at Clay Junction gave his O. K. He had no more than done so, however, when Jimmy's sounder again clicked.

"Hello, Jimmy," spelled the sounder. "This is Carney at Boydstown. Was listening in on your message. Are you really going to quit?"

"You bet," replied Jimmy.

He liked young Carney.

"That bunch of inspectors been raising Cain with you?"

"It amounts to about that," affirmed Jimmy.

"The devil! They were down here yesterday stirring things up."

The sounder clicked brokenly for a moment; then:

"Say, Jimmy, if you're really going to quit so am I. Darned if I don't. They made me sore as a boil. That goes, Jimmy. I'll quit too."

"Don't do anything rash, kid," advised Leete.

"Don't you worry about that," returned the Boydstown agent. "I'm on. I'm in on this resigning stuff, too."

Another operator cut in on the wire and began to "jerk lightning."

"Hello, hello," spattered the newcomer, evidently another listener-in. "This is Hines at Martins Creek. What's up, mates? Everybody quitting on account of that gang of pin-headed inspectors?"

"You've got it, old bachelor," replied Jimmy, smiling to himself at thought of Harry Hines—fat, single, and forty.

"Then count me in too," said Hines promptly. "I've had enough of them. This is straight stuff I'm giving you."

"My, oh!" spelled Leete. "You too. Who's next?"

"I am," came the prompt response. "Taylor at Mason City."

"You, Taylor!" chided Jimmy. "You're old enough to know better."

"I'm old enough to know I should have done it sooner," came back Taylor. "The measly blockheads! You couldn't please those four boys, not if you batted a thousand and one! You can put my name on the list—and that's no joke."

"Good night!" said Jimmy Leete and closed the key.

He swung around and looked at the four inspectors.

"The movement seems to be spreading," he said.

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III

THE division terminal building at Clay Junction—on the upper floor of which are the division offices—stands with its south side parallel with the east and west main-line tracks. It is an old square building and at the height of the first-floor ceiling has a gently sloping, thirty-foot-wide shelter roof which extends from all four sides.

At the northeast angle of the building the corner of this shelter roof just skirts the edge of the branch-line tracks that bear off to the north in a sweeping curve; but on the south side of the terminal the shelter roof for its entire length covers the brick-paved space between the wall of the building and the main-line tracks.

The outside edge of the shelter roof stands at approximately the same level as the roof of a passenger-coach, and if any of the passengers who stuck their heads out of the windows while their main-line trains tarried at Clay Junction had been minded to do so they could have glanced up and noted that the space between the edge of the shelter roof and the roof of their coach was a scant foot.

On the same Wednesday on which Jimmy Leete resigned there were two passengers on a westbound passenger-train who were so minded. They were in the smoking-car, traveling west with no definite objective in view. Their only really definite purpose had been to leave behind them a certain Eastern seaboard city where unfeeling officers of the law had made the two feel that their presence was greatly undesired. This purpose the two now felt they had safely achieved and at Clay Junction they leaned out, each from his window in the uncrowded smoker, and observed the bustling without—and especially the transfer of express from the connecting branch-line train to their own.

The tight-lipped, felt-hatted man in the front seat presently chanced to glance up idly at the shelter roof just above his head. He looked down; but in a moment something he had seen must have developed in his busy brain into the germ of an idea, for he cast a quick look up at the shelter roof again, his eye traveling along its edge until it rested on the spot just above the door of the express-car of the train on which he journeyed. He seemed pleased to note that the shelter roof extended as far as the express-car door, and for probably a car-length beyond that. He looked back at his narrow-eyed, derby-hatted companion gazing from the window next in the rear.

"Let's get off a bit, 'Pillbox,' " he said quietly.

Pillbox never batted an eye.

"Don't mind if I do," he returned. "Lead on, 'Gunner.' "

They descended to the platform. Gunner led the way as they strolled down toward the express-car, mixing in unobtrusively with the other people moving about the depot.

Standing close to the train, and at a discreet distance from the door where the transfer agent was handing a final assortment of sealed packages to the express messenger, Gunner spoke again to Pillbox; at the moment no other person was near.

"Look at the roof up above the express-car door," said Gunner in his quiet voice.

Pillbox cast a casual-appearing eye at the roof.

"Notice how much space between the car roof and the shelter roof?" proceeded Gunner.

"About a foot," responded Pillbox.

"If a fellow was up on that shelter roof, right opposite the express-car door, with a piece of pretty stiff wire—say a wire with a hook bent on the end—he might be able to do a little job." Gunner's voice was carefully pitched to reach Pillbox's ear only.

Pillbox spat carelessly over the edge of the brick platform.

"Yes?" he pressed.

"Might hook up a sealed package like the guy is handing in there now. See, while he stoops for another and while the express guy signs in the book. That'd be the time, boy! You'd have to be slick, and swift. But you might grab up something pretty good; and they might never see it going—not if a man was smooth enough."

"We've been called smooth," observed Pillbox. He smiled slyly. "It'd be a sort of grab-bag stunt, eh? You'd take what you'd draw, or hook; take a chance on it being something worth while?"

"Sure," replied Gunner. "You'd have to gamble on what you'd get. It might be a sealed package of ten-cent jewelry

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or it might be a package of the long green; and about one grab is all a man would want to risk, too."

A born gambler, Pillbox's eyes glistened. "I'd take a chance."

"At night would be the time, of course," said Gunner, still planning. "Then no one would be liable to see you up on the roof."

At his nod the two strolled further toward the head end of their train. Just outside the cover of the shelter roof they stopped. Gunner turned and looked aloft at the upper part of the terminal building.

"Just as I thought," he said. "See, a man could easy get out on the shelter roof from one of the second-floor windows; and at night I bet 'most all those offices up there are deserted—which'd make it a cinch."

"How would you carry the piece of wire so's nobody would notice?" asked Pillbox.

"Bend it around me and wear it under my coat," answered Gunner. "We could straighten it out after we got on the roof."

Pillbox appeared partly satisfied. "That part might work," he acknowledged. "But why not get up there by crawling up over the express-car itself, after the train arrives?"

Gunner shook his head decisively.

"We'd want to make our getaway that way," he said, "and when I'm on a job you'll never catch me coming and going over the same trail. No; we'll get out there through a window and then leave over the car; that way we'll make no back tracks. Sometimes covering the same ground twice is dangerous business."

The express and baggage by this time had all been transferred. Trucks were pulled away from the train; the trainmen's cry of "b-o-o-a-r-d" rolled along the platform.

"Will we go on?" questioned Pillbox.

"Yes," replied Gunner, moving back toward the smoker from which they had come. "We'll go on for a few miles, anyway."

"And then work back this way?" quizzed Pillbox.

Gunner nodded affirmation.

"And then work back this way," he said.

The two of them swung up the steps of the smoking-car.

IV

IT WAS a smoldering and vexed superintendent whom Peelman encountered Thursday morning when the division supervisor of stations entered Dermott's office in response to a summons which the superintendent had wired to him.

Dermott bounced to his feet as soon as Peelman entered the office.

"What in the devil's name have you fellows been doing?" cried the superintendent sharply, confronting Peelman. "What's got into all of you? Here yesterday afternoon Jimmy Leete, at Tipton, wires me his resignation; and then this morning here comes three more—from the agent at Boydstown, the agent at Martins Creek and the agent at Mason City. Leete's out already and the other three want out just as quick as we can get men there to relieve them. Why have they resigned, I ask you?"

He glared at the supervisor; the words came from him in a gushing torrent.

Supervisor Peelman, overwhelmed, made several efforts at coherent speech before he succeeded in saying anything intelligible. The supervisor was uncomfortable; decidedly so. Superintendent Dermott—tall and slender, with a decisive jaw and mouth which sometimes contrasted strangely with his wide deep dreamer's eyes—always had been more or less of a puzzle to Peelman. The supervisor never was certain what Dermott was going to spring next; and frequently the things that the superintendent sprang were startling in their unexpectedness.

"Why — why — " stumbled Peelman. "Nothing—for no special reason, that is. I can not understand, either, why they have resigned. We've been doing nothing new, nothing unusual."

"Nothing unusual!" exclaimed Dermott. "I'll bet on that! Dash it all, Peelman, if you fellows would do something unusual once in a while perhaps things would go better."

He took an impatient turn across the office.

"Hang it, Peelman, good agents don't grow on every tree, the way you fellows seem to think. And here now is Jimmy Leete quitting—Jimmy Leete who's just about the best agent I've got on the whole blooming division."

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Dermott paused and faced Peelman, finger extended accusingly.

"Jimmy Leete wires me to inquire of you if I wish more details. I do wish more details. If Jimmy Leete quits I know there's a reason. I want to know that reason. Now then, you go ahead and tell me. Tell me of all that took place out there at Tipton yesterday; I want to hear the whole story, complete."

"Yes, sir," replied Peelman nervously. He cleared his throat with difficulty, several times. "I'll do my best, Mr. Dermott."

So Supervisor Peelman told Superintendent Dermott of Wednesday's events at Tipton. He told his story pretty straight because he felt it would be useless to try to fool Dermott; the superintendent would be quizzing the other inspectors later and checking their statements one against the other.

And those words of Jimmy Leete's that Peelman did—perhaps unwittingly—soften or omit, Dermott filled in for himself pretty shrewdly—because Dermott had known Jimmy Leete for a good many years and, knowing him as he did, had a good idea of what the speech and actions of the agent at Tipton would be under certain circumstances.

But even though Dermott had known Jimmy Leete so well he found—as Peelman's tale progressed—that he had not known him as thoroughly as he had thought. As he listened to the supervisor's recital the superintendent's eyes had first expressed some slight surprize, then amazement, and a little later, as Peelman touched on Leete's lecture to the four inspectors, came a swift, passing gleam of humor; but when Peelman came to the end of his story the superintendent's eyes were cloudy with deep thought, his face grave.

"So after wiring you his resignation Leete gathered together his personal belongings," concluded Peelman; "and then, despite our protests, he left, handing the keys to Traveling Auditor Braden."

Superintendent Dermott nodded his head slightly to indicate that he heard. The end of the tale did not appear to interest him so much. In fact when Peelman reached that part Dermott seemed half-absorbed in some profound reflection and was giving only a detached attention to the supervisor's conclusion. Which was rather astonishing to the supervisor, he having figured that the abruptness of Leete's departure would interest Dermott the most and would call from the superintendent some justification for his, Peelman's, conduct at Tipton.

"So he left, did he?" said Dermott.

Some way the words sounded like some mere idle observation; the superintendent was gazing fixedly at the floor.

"Yes," affirmed Peelman; "he left."

Superintendent Dermott appeared to rouse himself. He straightened erect, from the floor looking up directly into Peelman's face; and now the supervisor suddenly perceived that Dermott's deep dreamer's eyes were glowing with some inner light.

"By heaven!" cried Dermott, his voice booming out startlingly after his recent quietness. "By heaven, Peelman, Jimmy Leete is right! He's placed his finger on the very thing that has been causing friction and ill-feeling among the railroad boys for as long as I can remember! You inspectors—and lots of officials as well—do not work with the men over whom you have authority! You do work at them, you do try to get them. Instead of dropping a little oil on the points of contact you throw in a handful of sand; and then when she begins to grind and smoke you throw in more sand!"

The supervisor's jaw had sagged down. He was staring at Dermott as if doubting that he had heard aright.

"You mean——" faltered Peelman. "You mean——"

"I mean," cried Dermott, "just what I said! I mean that Jimmy Leete is right. I mean that there's not enough team-work; you and the boys along the line don't work together. Why, it's plain as the nose on your face—has been for years. It's so plain that everybody seems to have overlooked it; and just because it has been the accustomed way to do you inspectors have been going along in the same manner for years—creating friction by snooping around, censuring, bulldozing, trying to get something on the other fellow."

Dermott cracked his right fist into the open palm of his other hand.

"Plague take it all!" he exclaimed. "You inspectors expect the boys to be as expert in your own particular lines as you yourselves are. But where you've got one line the agent has a dozen—and the devil of it is

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you don't make any allowance for that. There's got to be a change. There will be a change. There's got to be a different feeling generated between officials and employees—a feeling of good-will toward one another, and helpfulness. It's coming, Peelman—coming not only in railroads but in all other corporations.

"Yes, sir; it's coming just as sure as fate. But the trouble is that a lot of us in official places are too blind to see it—too blind or too stubborn. Jimmy Leete has said it: we don't work with one another. And that's what we've got to come to—just that!"

The supervisor had managed to get his sagging jaw closed; but he still looked ill at ease, perplexed.

"Of course," he ventured, "that would be better."

He fell silent again, unable, or afraid, to say more.

"It would be better," agreed Dermott firmly, "and it will be better—on this division at least."

He stared hard at Peelman for a few seconds.

"Yes, sir," continued Dermott then, nodding his head like he had arrived at some decision, "it will be better on this division. I'm going to clean house; and the place where I start is going to be in the office of division supervisor of stations. You're first, Peelman!"

"I am first!" ejaculated the bewildered supervisor.

He stared at Dermott with startled eyes.

"You are first," reiterated Dermott firmly. "I'm going to clean house and you are number one to go."

"Go!" echoed Peelman. He was shocked. "Go!" he repeated faintly.

Dermott permitted a grim smile to flit across his face.

"Oh, you need not worry," he stated. "You'll leave the office of division supervisor of stations, but I'll save your face. I'll see that you are transferred to that vacancy in the division freight agent's office."

A measure of relief was visible in Peelman's pale face.

"I'm sorry," he said with an effort, "sorry if I haven't——"

"Say no more about it," broke in Dermott. "I'd keep you on where you are, but, to be perfectly candid, I'm afraid you're not the type. You've been there too long, are too set in your ways to change readily to the new order that I want established."

He strode back and forth a few times in the office.

"You see," he went on, "I can't afford to have my agents leaving—Jimmy Leete least of all. I've got to start something that'll hold them." Dermott frowned in deep reflection. "I wonder if there's some way I could get hold of Leete. Was he still in Tipton when you left there?"

Peelman nodded his head.

"Yes, he was still in town. But I heard that he was packing up, getting ready to leave."

"Good!" said Dermott. "Then perhaps I can get him to come here and see me. Perhaps I can persuade him to reconsider his resignation and go back to Tipton in his old place. Let's see. Did Relief-agent Conway take charge there this morning as instructed?"

"Yes," affirmed Peelman.

"Then I'll wire Conway to get hold of Jimmy and ask him to come."

Dermott glanced at Peelman.

"That will be all this morning, Peelman. I'll let you know just as soon as we get your new place lined up."

Within the next hour Superintendent Dermott had a reply to the message he sent Relief-agent Conway—the message requesting Jimmy's Leete's presence. Conway's reply read:

Tipton
May 1st

SUPT. DERMOTT
Clay Jct.

Leete will arrive Clay Jct. on No. 121 today. Will call your office immediately after train's arrival.

CONWAY.

V

JIMMY LEETE, coming west from Tipton on No. 121 on Thursday afternoon, bound for Superintendent Dermott's office at Clay Junction, ran into a delay at a point some thirty miles east of his destination. Eight big steel hopper cars of coal in an eastbound train had left the rails and spread themselves with great thoroughness over both eastbound and westbound tracks, completely blocking traffic in either direction. This derailment had occurred a bare hour before No. 121 came along.

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No. 121 was due in Clay Junction at 5:30 P.M The best figures obtainable at the point of accident after No. 121 reached there gave three more hours as the quickest possible time in which a track could be opened for the movement of trains. Therefore, figured Tipton's ex-agent, it would be at least eight-thirty before he would reach Clay Junction; Superintendent Dermott never would wait in his office for him until that late hour; he, Jimmy, would have to put up overnight in Clay Junction and then see the superintendent the following morning.

Having calculated thus, the ex-agent descended from his train, found a good seat of observation along the right-of-way and patiently resigned himself to contemplation of the busy workers struggling with the heaps of coal and of the tool-train which with its powerful crane was lifting bent and twisted cars with precision and ease.

With the tool-train had come a lineman and an operator, and a temporary telegraph office had been cut in on the train wire that stretched from pole to pole along the tracks, the purpose being to keep the dispatcher posted as to the progress made and developments. The temporary office consisted of a telegraph instrument set up on an upturned empty spike-keg. On another spike-keg the operator sat, pad on knees, pencil in hand. Operator Mixon was an old friend of Jimmy's and, his office being just across the tracks from the spot which Jimmy had chosen for observaton, he had waved his hand in greeting when the ex-agent first looked his way.

About six o'clock Operator Mixon held a sheet of paper aloft and called over to Leete.

"Message for you, Jimmy!"

Jimmy Leete arose and crossed the tracks.

"Thanks, old pal," he said to Mixon and took the message. He read:

Clay Jct.
May 1st

JAMES LEETE
care No. 121
Will wait here in my office until No. 121 arrives. Please be sure and call.

O. A. DERMOTT

"Want to answer?" inquired the old pal, offering pad and pencil.

"Guess I will," responded Jimmy.

He wrote:

SUPT. DERMOTT
Clay Jct.

I will be there.

LEETE.

"I'll get it right off," promised Mixon, reaching for his key.

"I'll be much obliged," said Jimmy. He returned to his place at the other side of the tracks.

It was three hours and forty minutes after No. 121's arrival at the derailment before a track was opened and the train got through; and it was exactly 9:10 P.M., and dark, when the train pulled into Clay Junction terminal.

Jimmy Leete alighted from No. 121, entered the terminal building and walked rapidly through the big waiting-room toward the stairway which led to the upper floors. This stairway was enclosed, not being visible to the general public when the door which gave access to it—and which opened directly into the main waiting-room—was shut. As Jimmy Leete approached this stair he noticed a tight-lipped, felt-hatted man and a narrow-eyed, derby-hatted man quietly and quickly open the door there, step through the doorway and then close the door behind them.

Jimmy was but a few seconds after the two men in passing through the stairway entrance. The stairway itself was rather narrow and dingy, and rather poorly lighted—as passageways in old railroad buildings are so apt to be. But, quickly as Jimmy had followed the two men, no sign of them was visible; they were not on the stairs, nor could he hear the sound of their footsteps in any of the corridors above.

If they had mounted the stairs at all—and they must have done that, for there was not the least semblance of a place below where they could be concealed—the two strangers must fairly have leaped up the steps to be out of Leete's sight so swiftly. Surely they had not been fleeing from him; he knew of no reason why strangers should do that; he doubted very much if they had seen him, as he was rounding a projecting corner in the waiting-room at the time he perceived them enter the stairway door.

"Some men in a hurry," muttered Jimmy.

Probably but for the fact of their quick disappearance he would not have given the matter further consideration; but their unexpected vanishing was surprizing. He

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stood quietly just inside the doorway, speculating as to what their reasons could be for such haste. And then, while he stood there, from somewhere just off the head of the stairway, in the corridor of the floor just above, came the faint slow scraping noise made by a window-sash being cautiously raised. The noise ceased for an instant, then was once again audible, as if the sash were being lowered.

His curiosity still further quickened, Leete listened closely. At this time of the day nearly all the different office forces would be gone, Jimmy knew. Who would be up there raising and lowering a window-sash; and even if it were some office employee, why would he be doing it so cautiously?

Unable to answer his own questioning satisfactorily, Jimmy strained his ears for other noises. None came, and after a moment's hesitation he started to creep silently up the stairs.

At the top of the steps the ex-agent peered around. One dim electric bulb at each end of the hallway made light enough to show that no person was in the corridor. But twenty feet from where he stood was a window. From previous visits to the second floor of the terminal building Leete knew that the window opened out on to the south side of the shelter roof which surrounded the structure.

Jimmy stepped carefully toward the window. Stooping, with one knee resting on the floor, he applied a cautious eye to a lower corner of the window-pane. Right near the window nothing unusual was visible. But down at the edge of the shelter roof, and slightly to the left of the window, there was unusual activity.

A faint glow shone in the darkness beyond the edge of the shelter roof, a faint glow made by the platform lights and by the many switch-lamps on the tracks and sidings of the terminal yards below. In addition, the dim light that came from the narrow ventilation windows at the top of the coach roofs on No. 121—still on the main line below the roof edge—helped to make the activity on the shelter roof fairly visible to the watching ex-agent.

At the edge of the roof two men, their backs to the window, were bent over, peering down at something just below them. Their attitude was tense and strained, predatory.

"The two men in a hurry," murmured Jimmy to himself. "Something in the wind. That'll just about be over No. 121's express-car."

FOR a long moment the two men held their positions immovably, taut and alert, and Jimmy watched them just as immovably. Then suddenly one of the men did move. He bent further out over the edge of the roof; his hands thrust downward quick as a flash; he straightened as quickly, and some small white object from below swung above the roof and dropped beside him and his companion.

Instantly the man caught up the white object; the two men then stood up, and in a second had stepped from the shelter roof to the roof of No. 121's express-coach, had walked stealthily over the coach roof until they reached the end of the car, had clambered down the coach-ladder there and had disappeared.

"Got it!" breathed Jimmy Leete. "Got it, by heck—and gone! I guess we better see!"

Without the least hesitation he raised the sash of the window through which he had been watching, scrambled out on to the shelter roof and approached the spot where the two prowlers had been.

As he reached the place his foot struck something that jingled on the tin roofing. He picked it up and perceived that it was a piece of wire about nine or ten feet long and that at one end of it a hook had been bent—a hook with a sharp, needle-like point.

Peering down over the edge of the roof Jimmy beheld the transfer man wheeling his truck away from the express-car. From the truck the ex-agent looked at the hook in his hand. What mystery there had been was mystery no longer.

"Hooked it, or I'm a bloomer!" ejaculated Jimmy. "Yes, sir, that's what they've done—hooked a package from the truck. Right out from under that expressman's nose—and him never seeing it go, I'll bet a dollar. The nervy sons-of-guns!"

But that was as long as Jimmy Leete tarried there—just long enough to get his solution straightened out. He, like the two before him, dropped the wire. He stepped over the foot-wide space to the roof of the express-car, moved to the end of

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the car as the prowlers had done, and like them clambered down the ladder there.

"This'll bear looking into," said Jimmy to himself as he descended. "There might be something in that package those two boys oughtn't to have."

Leete alighted on the side of the coach that was farthest from the depot. He was positive that is what the other men would do; they would want darkness. An eastbound freight-train was just starting to pull from a siding just beyond the eastbound main-line track. Intuitively Jimmy felt that the men he pursued would take that freight.

The first dozen or so cars of the freight were box cars with doors closed tight. Jimmy figured the men would take none of those. But about the middle of the train came two open-topped gondola cars. Crouching down inside either of these the two would be well concealed and fairly safe from discovery. It would be one or the other of the gondolas, Jimmy decided. He swung himself aboard the first one, finding foot-room at the end of the car, and stooping so that his head would not be visible above the top of the four-foot-high end.

The freight rolled out of the siding and on to the main line east while Jimmy Leete crouched over the drawhead, planning his campaign further; and as the train slowly picked up speed the ex-agent began to decide that he faced a pretty difficult undertaking if he persisted in his endeavor to recover that white-appearing express package. He began to wonder if he shouldn't have gone for help before starting his present one-man hunt for the thieves. Still, he reflected, it was too late now to ponder over that; he'd come this far alone, he'd go the rest of the way alone.

Delay, he concluded, could do no good. The terminal building by this time had been left nearly a mile behind; the freight was clear out of the yards and was beginning to hit up a more lively clip. Action was the word, Jimmy decided. Doubtless the two with the package would be desperate, could be expected to offer resistance. Still, he'd have to chance it.

The ex-agent raised his head above the end of the car and peered over. Lying flat on the lading inside the car—the lading in the uncertain darkness looking like sand—their faces down-turned, and within five feet of where the ex-agent stood, were the two men he sought. One, the man nearer him, with one protecting arm snuggled the white package against his side.

Jimmy Leete had an inspiration. Out of nowhere there flashed to him recollection of a soldier company in which every man who didn't carry a banner beat a drum. Strategy along that line was old, old as the hills; nevertheless it might still work.

The ex-agent climbed silently over the end of the car, finding, upon arrival inside, that the lading was indeed sand. Then, balancing himself, he raised his voice.

"This way, boys!" shouted Jimmy Leete lustily. "This way! Come on, here they are!"

At the same instant Jimmy leaped upon the man nearer him; he clutched the white package before the surprized thief could resist and tossed it back of him toward the end of the car over which he had just come.

The astonished thieves scrambled to their feet swiftly. Jimmy fell upon them with flying fists, his shouts rising above the rumble of the cars.

"This way, boys! Come on, here they are!"

Tipton's ex-agent made outcry enough for a dozen. If the two thieves did not believe there were that many assailants in the car no doubt they became convinced that at least that number were coming. What protest they raised against Jimmy's assault was mostly defensive. True indeed that one of them pulled a dull-shining weapon from a pocket. But Jimmy, with surprizing agility, leaped in the air and kicked the weapon clear out of the man's hand and over the side of the car.

"Whoopee!" howled Jimmy Leete. "This way, boys!"

The two thieves fled. No use, so they must have concluded, to combat such a fighting demon. They turned their backs on Jimmy Leete, ran to the far end of the gondola and piled pell-mell over the end and recklessly flung themselves off the car to the ground.

Once they had started their flight Jimmy offered no barrier to the two thieves' going. As he beheld them drop off the gondola he turned and picked up the white express package lying in the sand behind him. Panting from his exertions, but happy, he leaned against the side of the car. Somewhere to the west, probably two miles

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distant, Superintendent Dermott in his office in the terminal building would be about deciding that Jimmy Leete was not coming.

"The old man," panted Jimmy, "will be thinking I'm a bird—'specially after me sending him that message I'd be there."

He considered in silence for a moment.

"Well," he proceeded, "there'd be little gain in going back tonight. He'd be gone before I'd get there—and what's the use of hunting him up and bothering him before morning. Guess I'll just ride along till we reach the next town. I'll drop off there, put up for the night and mosey down to see him in the A.M."

So for ten minutes more he leaned comfortably over the side of the gondola while the freight trundled on. Then a few scattered lights ahead warned Jimmy that the train was approaching the next town—Milnerville. The ex-agent looked down at the express package.

"I guess you'll be safe with me overnight," he grinned. "Come along; let's get off."

VI

SUPERINTENDENT DERMOTT had waited in his office for Jimmy Leet until nine-thirty Thursday night; and then when Leete failed to show up the superintendent had, reluctantly and wondering somewhat, departed for his home; No. 121 he knew had arrived twenty minutes before, giving Leete ample time to have reached the office. Dermott couldn't bring himself to believe that the ex-agent had turned him down flat. Nevertheless if Leete had not done that why had he failed to turn up—especially as his message from the scene of the derailment showed that he was actually on the way? Dermott was at a loss for an explanation.

Early Friday morning Dermott was aroused from his slumbers by the persistent jingling of his telephone. He arose and answered the call.

"Hello! Yes, this is Dermott."

"Chief Dispatcher Malloy speaking. The express messenger on last night's No. 121 reports that he is short a package of currency, value one hundred and twenty thousand dollars, consigned to Northside Savings Bank, Chicago. He advises it should have been transferred to him here at Clay Junction last night, billed from Westwood, up on the branch. According to his report he discovered the package was missing about half an hour after 121 left here. He claims that the package must never have been put in the car."

"The devil!" ejaculated Dermott. "And what does our transfer man say?"

"The transfer man maintains that he put the package on 121 and shows the messenger's signature in his book for it."

"Well! And what time did you get word of the shortage?"

"It was about midnight when we received the messenger's wire. He says he spent about an hour hunting through his car for the parcel before he wired us; claims he wanted to be positive it was gone."

"What's to be done?" asked Dermott.

"We've been working all night on the case but don't seem to get anywhere. The messenger is under arrest; but personally I find it hard to think him guilty. He's always been a good man, and I hear he's scared absolutely white."

"I'll be right down," said Dermott briefly; he hung up the receiver.

The superintendent dressed in haste, swallowed a bite of breakfast, and hurried away.

There was a sort of repressed excitement in the atmosphere of the terminal building when Dermott arrived there. Plain-clothes men were moving about, alert and sharp-eyed. Some newspaper-men who had got wind of the disappearance of the package were nosing about, hoping to gather in something to feed the public. They crowded around Dermott as soon as they sighted him; but with a good-natured smile he avoided them, telling them he had no statement to make.

For an hour the superintendent was busy in his office—so busy going into details regarding the missing currency that the matter of Jimmy Leete temporarily slipped from his mind. There were express and railroad police department men to interview, reports to be scanned, notifications to be sent out, the search for some tangible clue to be speeded up; because, as Chief Dispatcher Malloy said, so far all efforts had gained them nothing, not the least trace of the money having been found.

It was about eight o'clock when a quiet knock sounded on the door of Dermott's office; the last police official had just left and the superintendent was alone.

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"Come in!" called the superintendent, without raising his eyes from some papers on his desk.

The door opened and closed. Dermott looked up. Jimmy Leete, smiling, a newspaper-wrapped parcel under his arm, stood before him.

"Jimmy Leete!" cried Dermott, springing to his feet. "Why, bless my soul! Where've you been all this time?"

"I've been busy," smiled Jimmy.

He advanced into the office and carefully placed his parcel on the corner of the superintendent's desk.

"I looked for you last night," said Dermott. "Waited here until nine-thirty."

There was the slightest possible note of reproof in his voice.

"I'm sorry," said Jimmy apologetically, "that I had to disappoint you; but it just seemed I had to do it."

The superintendent looked at the ex-agent keenly. There was something whimsical in Leete's words and manner that was puzzling.

"That's all right," said Dermott. "Don't mention it if something delayed you." He smiled. "To tell the truth, Jimmy, I've been so busy this morning that I'd pretty near forgotten about your coming."

"I noticed an awful bustling about as I came through the station," said Jimmy soberly. "Seems as if I heard rumors about a lot of money being missing—an express package or something."

Dermott nodded.

"Yes, there's something in it. That's what I've been so busy about."

Jimmy Leete reached down and began, apparently idly, to fumble with the newspaper wrapping on his parcel.

"Was it much?" he inquired.

"We haven't been giving out the exact figures," returned Dermott. "But I don't mind telling you, privately, that it was. One hundred and twenty thousand dollars is the amount."

With thumb and forefinger Jimmy had snapped the thin cotton string that held the newspaper in place.

"If that's the amount then I guess you can call your police dogs in from the search," he said. His merry eyes belied the casualness of his words. "Because I guess maybe this is the package they're looking for."

He thrust back the newspaper wrapping, exposing an inner parcel to view. It was a compact, square inner parcel, bound with stout twine and wrapped with strong white paper whose lapping edges were sealed with round daubs of red wax. On the paper was pasted an express label and below the label was written an address and some figures.

Amazed, Superintendent Dermott stared from Leete to the parcel.

"The package!" he cried, incredulous.

He bent over the parcel, his eyes focused on the writing thereon.

"Currency, value $120,000," he read aloud. "The Northside Savings Bank, Chicago, Illinois."

Dermott straightened up, something jumping through his brain so swiftly that he half-expressed it in words before he could restrain himself.

"Jimmy," he burst out, "where did you get this? You didn't take—you didn't——"

He broke off, all at once realizing what it was he was about to say.

But Jimmy Leete made no sign that betokened offense.

"Yes," he said, a quiet smile on his face, "I took it. That's what delayed me last night. But I didn't take it the way you were thinking. I took it from the two thieves who'd snatched it from the express truck."

SUPERINTENDENT DERMOTT sat down abruptly in the chair beside his desk.

"Go on," he urged, his voice in his surprize and bewilderment sounding feeble. "Go on, Jimmy. Tell me all about it."

In a few words Jimmy told how he had chased the crooks and recovered the parcel. Then he waved his hand as if dismissing the whole affair.

"And now," he inquired, "what was it you wanted to see me about?"

Superintendent Dermott seemed to be having difficulty in finding the exact words he wanted.

"Jimmy," he said; "Jimmy—just a moment. Let me sort of get myself gathered up and straightened out."

The superintendent sat gazing steadily at Tipton's former agent. A rather unusual man, this Jimmy Leete, he ruminated. Jimmy had brains, and could use 'em; he had ideas and convictions, and stuck to 'em; he had nerve and courage, and was

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modest about 'em. Did he, Dermott, have the ability to talk a man like this into going back to the Tipton agency? And if Jimmy should go back to Tipton wouldn't it simply be hiding a light under a bushel?

A sudden thought, a new and unexpected thought, struck Dermott. Why, dash it all, the very thing! It had taken this express-package business to shock him fully alive as to the possibilities in Jimmy Leete.

"Jimmy," said Dermott, finding his tongue, "you beat the devil. I surely appreciate your efforts about this package of money; it takes quite a load off my mind.

"But," he continued, "I've still got something on my mind—and maybe you can help me with that, too."

"You're welcome to any help that's in me," smiled Leete.

"All right, thanks. Then this is what's troubling me. You see, I've been hearing about that little lecture you delivered Wednesday to those four inspectors—the lecture about them not working with the boys, and so on. And by George, Jimmy, you're right—right as rain! We've got too many of these irritating brain-power experts around and not enough soothing common-horse-sense experts. I tell you, Jimmy, you hit the nail on the head, and I'm going to clean house—going to get rid of some of the irritating kind!"

"I'm glad to hear it!" said Jimmy enthusiastically.

"Yes, sir," said Dermott, "I'm going to clean some of them out. In fact, I have started; I've cleaned out Division Supervisor of Stations Peelman already."

"The dickens!" observed Jimmy.

"That's what I have," declared the superintendent. "I'm aiming to put a man in there who'll go around and, as you said last Wednesday, be a real help to the boys; a man who'll work with 'em and develop some real team-work. I'm going to use that lecture of yours as a basis and have him work right along the lines you suggested."

"Oh, gosh!" said Jimmy, attacked with sudden embarrassment.

"Yes, sir," said Dermott, "that's what I am. And say, do you suppose a man like that could go out and persuade those boys at Boydstown, Martins Creek and Mason City to reconsider their resignations and stay on the job? Do you suppose he could if he'd show them that we really mean business when we say things are going to be better for them?"

"Yes, sir," said Jimmy promptly. "If he could show 'em the goods I haven't the least doubt they'd stick."

Superintendent Dermott leaned forward in his chair.

"Then," he said, "you go out and show them!"

Jimmy Leete, ex-agent, caught his breath.

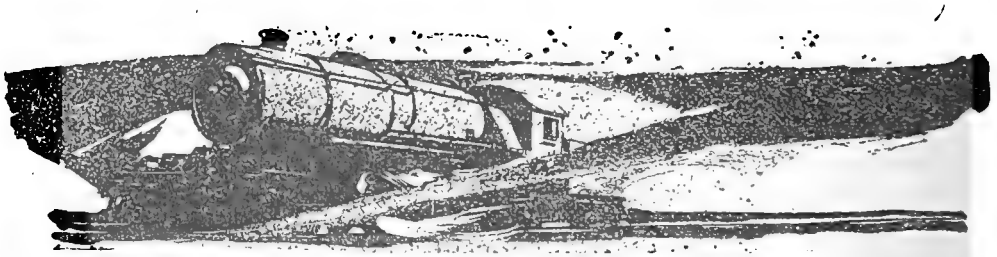
"You want me to go!" he cried. His eyes suddenly began to shine. "You're saying——"

Dermott got up from his chair and extended his hand.

"I'm saying," he said, "that I need a new division supervisor of stations, and I believe that I've found him. Have I?"

Jimmy Leete grasped the proffered hand.

"You have!" said he.



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ALIAS JOHN DOE

by Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "Tennessee Holman, Gentleman," "That Woman," etc.

HE HAD called himself that once in a desperate and yet whimsical moment, and he stuck to it afterward because it didn't seem to matter just what he called himself. Let us know him by that name until his real name comes out in the wash.

Now for the wash.

It was not John Doe's fault that he had but a single friend on earth. He was one of these ill-starred mortals who find themselves roped and hog-tied in a web of circumstance from which there is, so far as they are able to see, no escape possible. Had he been of the quitter blood, he would have remained in the little Southern city that was his home city, where even the ministers spoke to him patronizingly and looked upon him as an outcast.

But John Doe was not of the quitter blood. He went far into the mountains, into the Little Pigeon River logging country, where a man's past and his name and his future are affairs of his own, where one is known only for what he is at the present, living moment.

He dropped off an empty logging-train at the Rufus A. Crandall Lumber Company's logging-camp on Grandpap's Creek, and he had not been there twenty minutes when one of the greatest trials of his already severely tried life fell upon him, as it were, with claws unsheathed and naked.

It was at sundown of a fine June day, and the Grandpap's Creek loggers, all of them stalwart and sunburned, broad-hatted, booted and corduroyed men, were just coming in from the woods. Half a dozen of them went straightway into the big and rough building which held the company's commissary; as many more went straightway into the boarding-house, another big and rough building. The remainder of the crew of two score, led by a Great Darcy of a timberjack who was rather handsome so long as his eyes were not noticed too closely, started across the clearing to initiate the newcomer, the much persecuted John Doe.

That stranger in a strange land saw that he was the reigning object of interest, and he wondered why; he knew little of life in a logging-camp. But he didn't wonder long. He had stopped on the creek's bank, with his back to the gurgling stream. The loggers and their leader drew up before him, and the leader looked him up and down insolently.

This man was the Grandpap's Creek outfit's bully extraordinary, being extraordinary because he bullied even the superintendent and because he was a person of no mean education and intelligence. He had come to Grandpap's Creek a year before, and Superintendent Ballinger had nicknamed him "Lord Harry" on account of his pseudo-highflown ways. His name on the time-book was Harris Elberfield.

"Lord Harry" pretended to screw a monocle in one eye; then he again looked

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John Doe up and down with an insolent stare. He saw a man as stalwart as himself, a man of even better physique than himself, a well-set-up man with great strength evident in every line of him, and especially in his arms and shoulders. Doe realized that he was being made a goat, and his gray eyes flashed with resentment.

"Well, say it!" he clipped.

"Ah, it can speak; hear it, boys?" Lord Harry chuckled impudently.

The timberjacks laughed. John Doe went a clean white, the clean white of a man whose temper is high. Elberfield winked a signal to one of the loggers, and this man slipped behind John Doe and went to the ground on his all fours. Then Lord Harry gave the newcomer a shove with both his hands, and the newcomer stumbled over the body of the logger and fell hard into the shallow, stony creek.

A roar of laughter went up. The stranger rose dizzily; one hand went to his head and brought back the color of blood; his head had struck a stone. He waded out of the stream, threw off his almost-threadbare coat and rolled his sleeves quickly, showing forearms that were most wonderfully muscled. Elberfield squared himself; fighting was the glory of his life. The loggers formed a circle around them, watching eagerly and expectantly. They saw John Doe suddenly put up his guard and spring like a panther for Lord Harry.

Then John Doe stopped, as a man who remembers that the thing he is about to do is a thing that is terribly wrong, dropped his arms to his sides and bent his head as though in shame.

But Elberfield did not drop his arms to his sides. Elberfield led out with a sledge-hammer blow that caught the stranger in the throat unawares and drove him to the ground on his back. As the fallen man essayed to rise, Elberfield sent a lightning-like punch to his face.

And this time John Doe lay where he had fallen. Not even when he heard a feminine voice calling Lord Harry a coward and a brute did he try to get up. Nor did he open his eyes to see who it was that had spoken.

The loggers moved toward the boarding-house, and he took no note of it. For three minutes he lay there and thought dazedly of the utter uselessness of everything so far as he was concerned; it was the nearest he had ever come to thoughts of giving up the last shred of hope and quitting for good and all. Then he heard soft footfalls in the grass beside him, and there came the same voice that had called Harris Elberfield a coward and a brute. But it was softer now.

"ARE you hurt very much?"

John Doe sat up slowly, looked upward slowly. Before him, holding a tin basin of water in both hands, stood a girl who was just turning into womanhood, a strikingly pretty girl with topaz-brown eyes and sunny-brown hair, and with a figure that was slender and supple and yet full enough to be beautiful.

Unlike the few other girls he had seen in the hills, she wore her hair on her head instead of hanging down her back in a single plait, and she wore shoes and stockings that were not cheap ones. Her dress was a pale-blue percale edged in white, and it had been laundered with infinite neatness and care. Altogether, she was a delight for any eyes.

He reached for his hat, and discovered that he had lost it. Then he got to his feet.

"Your face is bleeding," she said, her voice a gentle drawl as before.

But it was not the voice of an illiterate person, by any means. Old Selah Betterton, aristocrat among mountain-folk, had seen to it that his daughter had as much education as a lowland town's schools could give her.

John Doe took the basin awkwardly, set it on the grass and knelt before it. When he had bathed his face and his hands, he dried them as well as he could on his handkerchief; this done, he rose and turned to the girl who had befriended him, and thanked her.

She ignored his thanks.

"Everybody fights here," she said in tones that bordered sharply on reproof. "It's their one big game. Why didn't you fight Harris Elberfield? You didn't even try! I hate fighting, but—the first law God ever made for men was the law of self-defense. You look as strong as Harris—you look even stronger. Maybe I—I oughtn't say it, but I—I'd give a thousand dollars to see somebody whip Harris Elberfield! Be-because he deserves a regular horse's dose of his own medicine!"

John Doe tried hard to train his tongue to silence when beset by anger. His anger

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was cooling rapidly now, and yet, his tongue somehow slipped its leash.

"I could have whipped him, if I'd tried!" he blurted. "I could have done it easily! If I were to tell you why I didn't fight him, you— Well, I'd better not tell you why I didn't fight him."

Being a true woman, Selah Betterton's daughter had sided with the under dog. Being ultra-human, she was piqued and disappointed. And being piqued and disappointed, she frowned and nearly stamped a foot.

"If you're going to the boarding-house," she said rather coldly, "you might take that basin back to the porch. It belongs there. The towel—I didn't see any towel."

With that, she turned toward a log that spanned the creek and walked it with the sure grace of a deer, and soon disappeared in a trail that led off through the riotously-blooming laurels. John Doe watched her admiringly in spite of himself, until the waxen-white sea had swallowed her up; then he found his battered hat, picked up the empty tin basin, and went toward the boarding-house of the loggers.

As he strode up the steps that rose at the center of the long, rough porch, his gaze fell upon a big and bearded, mild-eyed man in the clothing of a woodsman, who stood in the main doorway and gave his teeth a sort of once-over with a goose-quill toothpick. This was Superintendent Ballinger, and he seemed interested in the stranger.

"Want a job?" he asked, as Doe put the basin on a shelf.

"That's what I'm here for," answered John Doe. "I don't know logging, but I'm as strong as any man you've got, and I'm not afraid of work."

Ballinger stepped to the new man, and ran a hand over one of his upper arms. His eyes widened in surprize.

"You're muscled like a blacksmith!" he said. "I wonder why you let Lord Harry put it all over you without a fight?"

"We'll let that pass," frowned John Doe. "Will you put me on here?"

"Sure. And I'll put you on to something else. Alice Betterton, the girl who brought the water to you, is to marry Elberfield in September; and if you don't want trouble in bunches with Lord Harry, leave her alone. She comes to the commissary now and then, and this time we didn't have what she wanted. Her dad owns all the land within two miles of here, and old Rufus Crandall bought just the timber; Betterton means to turn all this into a big sheep ranch when the timber is gone. That's about all there is to tell you about the place, so you might go in to supper. The others are eating, but there's room for you. Wait—I want your name for the time-book."

"Write it John Doe," readily. "But don't get an idea from that that I'm hiding from anything like the law, for I'm not."

As the new man went toward the dining-room, he wondered how it had come about that Alice Betterton, that fine girl of the hills, to whom absolute liberty was but another name for life, was going to marry a man whom she would give a thousand dollars to see whipped.

But before he sought his narrow bed in the up-stairs sleeping-quarters of the Grandpap's Creek logging-crew that night, he told himself that it was no affair of his, and that he had no right to be concerned about it.

He donned loggers' clothes the next day, and he looked bigger in them.

Passed eight weeks, and John Doe found himself able to laugh again. Save for Lord Harry, all the other timberjacks liked and admired him for his kindly way and his superior strength. Alice Betterton liked him, because it was written that she should, and she took little pains to keep it a secret; and in here may be found the reason for Harris Elberfield's mounting hatred of John Doe. Selah Betterton liked him too; he had eaten three excellent Sunday dinners with Selah Betterton, at the old hillman's pressing invitation.

And, in spite of the everlasting black looks of Lord Harry, John Doe was grateful almost unto tears for this new world he had found in Tennessee's back o' beyond. As for a marriage between Betterton's daughter and the bully, he had heard a great deal more of that through the mouths of his fellow timberjacks.

During those two months, Lord Harry had tried many times to force John Doe into a fight; Elberfield believed himself invincible. But John Doe kept his head level, and would not take up the gauntlet, though more than once Elberfield had goaded him almost past the end of his tether by striking him open-handed in the face and by streams of insolent invective.

All this did not bring Doe down very far

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in the eyes of the other loggers, however. The other loggers had seen Doe tie an iron rod into a knot, they had seen him twist the bark from a sapling with his bare hands, and they had seen him lift one end of a log that the bully never could have moved at all; they knew John Doe could fight if he wanted to, and they speculated much as to why he didn't want to.

But not once did anybody guess within miles of the truth.

Then the hardest of the wash began, the part that was to bring out John Doe's real name and surprize everybody on Grandpap's Creek—with the exception of Harris Elberfield; and it would have surprized him too, had he not been dead at the time.

IT COMMENCED to happen early in an evening around the middle of August. As the weary loggers swung into the camp clearing by way of a dim trail that opened out directly in front of the commissary building, they saw that Alice Betterton stood in the doorway with her steady topaz-brown eyes upon them. She held a few small packages in her arms. Lord Harry stepped forward eagerly, and asked to be permitted to carry her purchases. She ignored him altogether, hastened past him and brought up squarely before John Doe.

"I want to see you, John," she said.

With that, she turned and started homeward. She had taken it for granted that John Doe would follow her; and he did follow her, while Elberfield stood with a thickly clouded countenance and watched them until they had disappeared in the woodland path that led to old Selah Betterton's, a mile away. Then somebody behind Elberfield laughed derisively. Lord Harry wheeled with his hands clenched and with his teeth shut tight. Every face he saw was as immobile as a mask.

"I don't know who did that," he growled, his eyes gleaming like those of an enraged wild animal; "but I can whip him, whoever he is."

Nobody disputed it. Elberfield scowled and went toward the boarding-house.

Once the two were wholly out of sight from the camp, Alice Betterton dropped back beside John Doe. He asked to carry her packages, but she wouldn't let him. Neither did she thank him. They walked on in silence for a few minutes, and Doe watched her profile out of the tail of his eye. It was a study. He couldn't understand this. Then she spoke in a low and serious, half-angry and half-injured voice.

"John, I thought you were different from the ordinary run of men, and I like you for it. I'd seen lots of you, and talked lots with you. We'd read the same books, and we liked and didn't like the same books. It seemed that we had a great many interests in common, John. I—I never thought you'd say un-uncomplimentary things about women, as some other men do—least of all, I never thought you'd talk about me!"

At last she'd got it out. Her companion stopped like a man shot, and faced her. She halted just as abruptly, and turned to him a little defiantly, standing as straight as a young cove birch.

"I don't say uncomplimentary things about women," he declared, "and I never talked about you. I—I hate to say it, but it must have been Elberfield who told you I did. Because he's the only man here that could lie like that, Alice."

"It was Harris," she admitted. "He told me you said you hated all women, and that you were very tired of my making eyes at you every time I saw you! He told me lots of other things just like that, and it made me so m-m-mad that I cried all n-n-n-n-night about it!"

Her voice broke into a deep, hurt sob. Two bright tears ran down her cheeks, and she bent her head; her fine shoulders shook convulsively for a moment. John Doe stood there before her, as still and almost as pale as a work in marble, and watched her with well-nigh overpowering emotions of rage and pity and love warring together in his heart. Of late, it had been hard for him to keep from thinking, and dreaming, of Alice. Had it not been for all that which lay in the pathway of his life behind him; had it not been for her engagement to Elberfield . . . .

"Harris told it all very—very straight," she went on, speaking strongly now, with her head up again. "I couldn't help believing him. How am I to know you didn't say that about me, John?"

Even John Doe's lips went pallid. The muscles of his face quivered.

"I certainly wouldn't say such things, if I were that sort of man, about a woman I fairly worship—as I do you, Alice!" he

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said a little smotheredly. "I knew it was hopeless from the beginning, and I swore a hundred times to myself that I'd never breathe it to you; but—now it seemed necessary to tell you in order to convince you that I wouldn't discuss you with other people. I did it in defense of myself—I couldn't have you thinking such thoughts of me, Alice. I'll go back now. And I promise I'll never bother you with that any more."

He lifted his broad-rimmed hat, bowed slightly, and was about to leave her, when she dropped her commissary purchases to the ground and stopped him by placing a hand on his arm.

"Wait, John," she said softly, yet commandingly. "I don't want you to go yet, and I—I—nobody asked you to make any such promise! I wish you'd tell me all about yourself, John. Now and then since you've been here, you've acted the part of the greatest coward in the world, and yet—as my dad himself says—the marks of a real man stick out all over you like the thorns on a thorn-tree. John, I think you must have had a great deal of grief over something. It might help if you'd share it with me; maybe I could do something for you. Oh, I'll never, never tell! And—maybe—what you mentioned a minute ago is not as hopeless as you think!"

"But you're going to marry Elberfield!" blurted John Doe.

"Going to marry Elberfield!" she parroted in amazement. "Where'd you get that?"

"Elberfield himself talks it. You didn't——"

"I didn't!" she interrupted.

It was John Doe's turn to be amazed, and he was amazed.

"Then Lord Harry has been telling it as a simple way to be rid of possible rivals!" he exclaimed. "But—my case is hopeless anyway, Alice. I killed a man, Alice. When I was twenty. I served a term of five years in the State prison at Nashville, and I got out only six months ago. They called it—manslaughter. I've always had a terrible temper. It was that which led me to strike Goddard so hard that night. Goddard was just such a fellow as Elberfield; he looked like Elberfield, even, and had tricks of manner like him. Once it occurred to me that Elberfield was Goddard reincarnated; that Elberfield was Goddard come back from another world, to pay me back."

John Doe looked downward, looked up again, took a firm hold on himself and continued:

"It was very dark on that street. Goddard and I were walking home from a political meeting. He insulted me, and I struck him. When he fell, his head crashed into a corner of the curbing. I gathered him up and carried him to the nearest doctor. The doctor tried to bring him to, but he never did. So I was sent to the penitentiary for manslaughter, and they put me into the smith's shop, and that's where I got my big shoulders and arms.

"Now you can understand why I haven't fought Lord Harry, Alice. For one thing, it would be too much like striking Goddard again! I've been trying to control my temper, Alice, and I've succeeded; I'm master of myself now. I can let Elberfield beat me in the face for a day, and smile as long as I'm conscious, for I'm master of myself now!"

Though the first of that which he had told her had come broken-heartedly, tragically, pride and triumph were in his voice when he told of winning the battle against himself. He went on, and this came sadly:

"When at last I was free again and back at home, I tried very hard to forget all about Goddard and the penitentiary. But the people wouldn't let me. It's the common sin of any people; they never quite forgive a man who has done time in prison. A great faith they may have, and plenty of hope; but of human charity, they have little—and 'The greatest of these is charity.' Only my father stuck by me; I haven't any mother, or sisters, or brothers.

"He's a good old dad, Alice. He's worth considerable, and he's influential, but he couldn't put me back where I used to be. Nobody wanted to trust me, and nobody wanted to be in my company. I saw it was wearing on my father; I saw that his friends were slowly deserting him because of me, and that even his business was suffering because of me.

"Then I left him. I took the burden of myself from his stooped old shoulders. But I'm not sure I did right in that. It may be that he'd rather have me than everything else. Good old dad! He's the only person on earth that has any faith in me,

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and the only person that loves me Alice——"

John Doe's story broke off short. He choked, and his eyes swam. All his past sorrows, and all his present sorrows, were crowding into his heart in that one moment. He felt uncertainly for Alice's hand, and found it; he went down to his knees there in the laurel-lined trail, pressed the girl's slim hand to his lips and kissed it most reverently, and mumbled a good-by that he meant to hold for all time.

But Alice Betterton was not yet ready for such a good-by. She slipped her hand from his, knelt before him, and put both her arms around his neck. Hadn't he said that he worshiped her?

"He's a good old dad, I know," she murmured, "but he's not the only person on earth that has any faith in you, or that l-l-loves you, John Doe, as long as I'm alive. It doesn't matter to me that you've been to prison. I've been brought up to look upon people for what they are, and not for what they have been or what they're going to be. I wouldn't worry over that—that Goddard, John. Your killing him was an accident, and you're not to blame for his death."

"Yes, it was an accident," he agreed. "And yet——"

John Doe went no further with the subject. He had threshed it out to himself a million times before, and he had never found any comfort in it.

WHEN he left Selah Betterton's daughter that evening, he hadn't asked her to marry him, though she had given him the right of way. Much as she was inclined to forget all that which lay behind him, he couldn't quite believe it would be fair to propose marriage to her.

He reached the camp clearing about midway of the mountain twilight, and at once sought out Harris Elberfield. Elberfield was lounging on the porch steps, waiting for the supper gong. John Doe bent over, and whispered into the ear of the Grandpap's Creek bully—

"Miss Betterton asked me to tell you she wished to see you some time this evening."

Lord Harry looked up craftily.

"All right," he nodded.

He started for Selah Betterton's home the moment supper was over at camp.

When he returned an hour later, the moon had risen. In its white light the camp's two buildings and the trees that lined the edge of the clearing stood out with almost photographic distinctness. An owl cried mournfully from somewhere on the mountainside above, and a night-hawk shrieked; from afar came the slow baying of a hound at the ages-old mystery of the silver moon. Elberfield walked straight to the long, boarding-house porch, on one end of which Superintendent Ballinger sat smoking his pipe and watching the tiny wreaths as they drifted away and were lost in the pale light.

"Come here, Lord Harry," said Ballinger; and half a minute later Elberfield halted before him.

Ballinger was in a playful mood, and he was serious too.

"I've been thinking, your lordship," he went on, smiling, his voice now low.

"Well, well!" sneered Elberfield.

"That fellow Doe," said the superintendent, narrowly, "will be a good man for you to leave alone in the future, Lord Harry. You've nagged him to beat old Satan already, and I never saw a worm that wouldn't turn. First thing you know, he's going to eat you up, Bosco, my lord; take it from me!"

"Now, I wonder!" Elberfield exclaimed mockingly. "Look here, Bal; do me a favor; walk up-stairs with me, and see what you see; eh?"

Ballinger followed the stalwart Elberfield into the boarding-house, up the rough stairway, and into the big and long, single room that held the sleeping-quarters of the logging-crew. The men had not yet thought of bedtime; they sat here and there, swapped jokes, smoked, and played cards. Through the tobacco-fog strode Harris Elberfield and the superintendent, and Elberfield halted only when he had reached the narrow bed of John Doe, upon which John Doe sat: mending a blue shirt.

The bully folded his arms and stood looking contemptuously at the man whom he now hated bitterly. Alice Betterton had told him, not half an hour before, that she would be everlastingly grateful to him if he would keep himself out of her sight in the future; also she had made him take back certain bits of jewelry he had given her, which she had accepted solely because she hadn't wanted to hurt his feelings; and Elberfield had put all the blame at the door of John Doe.

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"You've been carrying tales about me, you renegade!" Elberfield accused.

"I have not," John Doe replied. "But I did say that you were the only man here who was capable of telling such barefaced, shameless lies as you tell whenever you think you can gain anything by them, and I have no apologies to make to anybody for having made that truthful statement."

The other timberjacks heard, gathered quickly and silently, and watched; and their sympathies were with the clean, strong man who sat with a blue shirt in his lap. Elberfield's countenance grew dark and terrible. He opened one hand, and deliberately slapped John Doe's sunburned cheek an insolent, stinging slap that could have been heard anywhere in that big boarding-house. Though no other blow he had ever taken from Lord Harry had urged him to forget the mastery of himself so much as that one, John Doe smiled.

Again Elberfield slapped the persecuted man, and again the persecuted man smiled. The watchers swore softly at Doe's strange forbearance, and wished that he would rise in his might and give the bully a whipping such as mankind had never dreamed of before.

John Doe did rise in his might. He did it as deliberately as Elberfield had insulted him, and he kept his good smile.

"You're wofully cheap as a bully, Elberfield," he said quietly. "I think I'd best show you that I could easily kill you with my bare hands, if I wished. Square yourself, you bogus lordship; I'm coming!"

Elberfield squared himself. He knew much of the game of fighting. But Doe did not strike his man when he rushed him; instead, he dove under and around, seized Lord Harry high by a trouserleg with one hand and by the back of his collar with the other, straightened and hoisted him at arms' length into the air. Elberfield was face-upward and powerless.

"Now what is there to keep me from throwing you to the floor and smashing you all up?" demanded John Doe.

While the onlookers stared open-mouthed, he put Elberfield on the floor, and held him there easily; he stood Elberfield on his head; he handled Elberfield as though he were no stronger than a rabbit. Plainly, there was nothing whatever to prevent his killing Lord Harry with his bare hands, if he so wished.

When at last he freed Elberfield, the enraged bully caught up a home-made chair and struck him across the head from behind. John Doe crumpled slowly to the floor. Elberfield looked the amazed crew over with the spirit of the old defiance in his eyes, laughed wickedly in Ballinger's face, then coolly walked down-stairs and into the moonlit night.

Friends helped John Doe to his feet, and certain of those friends cursed him for a fool. He stood dazedly for a moment, after which he turned toward the doorway.

"My head aches; I'll take it to the creek," was all he said.

And the others were so displeased because he wouldn't fight, when he really could fight, that not one of them went along with him.

HIGH in the shank of the morning of the next day, John Doe was working alone at felling a tree that stood at the head of a deep cove. His sleeves were rolled high, and his magnificent muscles knotted and slipped like serpents under the sunburned skin of his arms as he swung his two-bladed ax in powerful, ringing blows. As he worked, he sang snatches of an old song that he had heard Alice Betterton sing; and as he sang, he wondered, and wondered, whether it would ever be fair for him to ask her.

It came like a thunderbolt—he heard the voice of Alice, and it was frightened, calling to him from the pine-fringed crest of the ridge above him. He looked toward her. She was beckoning excitedly.

John Doe threw down his ax and hastened up the rocky steep. The girl was almost out of breath from running. She put her hands on his shoulders, and turned her brown eyes searchingly upon his face.

"John," she began falteringly, "they say—they say you killed Harris Elberfield last night when you two went out at about the same time! You didn't, did you?"

"I didn't," he answered quickly. "Tell me—whatever you know to tell."

"Mr. Ballinger," she said, "came to our house this morning early—it wasn't long after worktime—and wanted to use our 'phone; we're on the end of a country line that goes into Johnsville, as you know. He called Sheriff Light, and reported Elberfield's death. And I heard Mr. Ballinger tell my dad that he hated to report it, for the evidence pointed straight at you. For

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one thing, nobody saw Harris alive after you two left the boarding-house last night——"

She stopped talking to catch her breath. John Doe muttered gloomily:

"He wasn't at breakfast this morning, I remember. What other evidence is there against me?"

"I was coming to that, John. Somebody who was going to the commissary found Harris lying in the trail that leads from our place to the camp. It seems that he—he'd been clubbed to death. They said most of his bones, even, were broken, and he was bruised terribly!"

She shuddered, swallowed, and continued:

"And beside him lay a broken automatic pistol, with your name—John Doe—cut in one side of the handle. Mr. Ballinger thought perhaps Harris had started to our place, and you had followed him; he said—maybe—you had tried to shoot Harris, and—maybe—the pistol wouldn't fire, because it was broken. Then, he thought, you must have taken a club and killed him. That's all I know, John. Except that Sheriff Light was to come as far as the foothills in an automobile, and Mr. Ballinger was to have a logging-locomotive there to meet him and bring him the rest of the way up here."

John Doe shook his head slowly. It puzzled him, their having found an automatic pistol, with his assumed name cut in one side of its handle, lying beside Elberfield. John Doe had never owned a pistol, neither had he ever owned a revolver; but how was he to prove that to a judge and jury? The matter of the automatic was a thing he couldn't begin to understand.

The girl had taken her hands from his shoulders, and she now stood with her head bent sorrowfully.

"I looked for you for two hours before I found you, John," she said finally. "Sheriff Light has got to the camp by this time, of course. He's a little old fellow, but—my—he's as smart as a fiddle-string, John, and he 'most always gets his man. Are you going to run away?"

Doe jerked his head up.

"No. Perhaps there isn't a chance for me if I stay and fight it out; nevertheless, I'm going to stay and fight it out. If you're going toward the camp, Alice, I'll go with you. I'd like to spend the time that it takes to go, which is an hour, with you. Because there's a very slim chance of my every seeing you again, Alice."

He took her arm, and they started down the long mountain-slope and toward the camp. And, although Doe's hour stretched into more than two, neither spoke half a dozen words on the little journey.

As they approached the clearing through unbroken and laurel-filled woodland, the somewhat creaky voice of wizened Sheriff Light came to their ears. Doe glanced at his companion. She nodded. They moved rapidly and silently onward. Soon they had drawn up just inside the wall of laurel, from which point they could see without themselves being seen.

Not fifty feet out in the clearing, stood Light and Ballinger, the commissary clerk, bearded and lanky Selah Betterton, and—the owner of the logging operations on Grandpap's Creek, old Rufus A. Crandall himself. Crandall had been visiting his company's Johnsville headquarters, and he had come out with the sheriff. Tom Light, the "smart" little old officer who nearly always got his man, was talking.

"Made my investigations, and I've overlooked nothing, gentlemen," he was saying to the others. "This Elberfield has a record as a safe-blower. I never forget a face; and, though his is somewhat disfigured, I remember having seen photographs of it, front view and profile, a good many times. Judging by what I've been told and what I've found out myself since I've been here, it was about like this:

"Elberfield, badly wanted, is hiding here. He falls in love with Miss Betterton—because of her father's timberlands, no doubt. Finally she tells him she will not see him again, and he jumps at the conclusion that this fellow who calls himself John Doe, who is a friend of the Bettertons, is the cause of his trouble. So he sets himself to the task of putting John Doe out of the way and getting some money for himself at the same time by blowing Selah Betterton's old iron safe and leaving evidence to the effect that John Doe committed the robbery. See? Now listen.

"Elberfield cuts John Doe's name in the handle of his own—Elberfield's—pistol; I know this, for at the point of Elberfield's knife there is a tiny notch that is reproduced exactly in tiny ridges in the letters

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that were carved in the handle. The pistol was to be left lying by the blown safe. It was a Luger, a kind not common in this section. I found one overlooked Luger cartridge in Elberfield's effects, and none in John Doe's. See?

"Listen. Last night, Elberfield goes to pull off the robbery. He walks to the middle of a flower-bed under a window of the room in which the Betterton safe is kept, turns around, and goes back. A missing calk in one of Elberfield's boot-soles, and a missing calk-hole in just half the footprints, proves that Elberfield made the footprints, which were fresh. Well, he goes back for something which he has forgotten. It is soap to dam in the nitroglycerine.

"You see, there were footprints with missing calk-holes under that forced commissary window, too, and there was a soap-wrapper lying in the creek; and we found soap spattered over the laurels around where Elberfield was lying. Had he not forgotten about the soap, he wouldn't have had to break into the commissary to get it; it was late at night, you understand. Yes, Elberfield bungled somewhat. He might have underestimated the intelligence of country-town officers, if you'll pardon me for the statement.

"Now to his death. Nitroglycerine did that, and it also shattered the Luger. Elberfield had been here for a year, and the nitro must have been old; and old nitro, unless it was strictly pure to begin with, sometimes undergoes chemical changes that will cause it to explode itself. In this instance, it was either a spontaneous explosion, or Elberfield dropped the bottle to a stone in the trail; and it was a very small bottle, or he would have been blown to atoms. I am so sure of all this, gentlemen, that I shall not even arrest John Doe."

"It is plain that you are correct," said Rufus A. Crandall. "This John Doe; from what I hear of him, I like him. Might I see him, Ballinger?"

It was then that John Doe sprang from the cover of the laurels with a single gladsome word on his lips—

"Dad!"

Father and son were soon wringing each other's hands. Now it's out in the wash; John Crandall, alias John Doe. Old Crandall hastened to break the great news he bore, and no person there heard it with deeper joy than Selah Betterton's Alice.

"Son, you're clear all around!" This was the great news. "You didn't kill Goddard! Old Doc Wellin gave Goddard the wrong medicine by mistake, that night—gave him stramonium, a deadly poison, instead of aromatic spirits of ammonia! Wellin was sleepy, and the names of the medicines were a good deal alike. He always was rather careless, anyway. Wellin had a heart attack a month ago, and he thought he was going to die; he sent for me and confessed. You see, the old skunk wouldn't tell it at the time, for fear of losing his prestige as a physician. I've been searching everywhere for you, and I couldn't find a sign of you. Everybody at home will be glad to see you, son, when I take you back with me!"

ON THE afternoon of the following day, a day that the two Crandalls spent as honored guests of the Bettertons, John and Alice walked slowly up the steps at the vine-hung Betterton veranda, and confronted their respective sires.

"Dad," young Crandall said soberly, "you always advised me not to marry until I found a woman as good as my mother was. I—I think I've found her."

The democratic old lumberman rose smiling, and put out both his hands.

"I am willing to believe it," he said, "and I congratulate you!"

Alice moved silently toward her silent father. Old Selah caught her hand and pressed it tenderly in consent and blessing, and took out a red bandana and passed it across his eyes.

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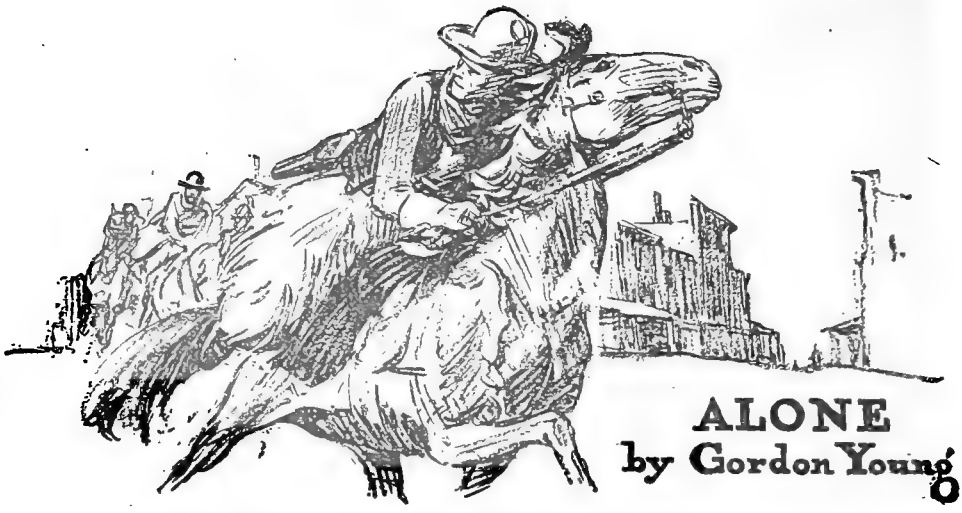

ALONE

by Gordon Young

Author of "Gaboreau the Terrible," "Law and Order," etc.

THE night was black; and the shot was fired as Langdon came through the cabin door.

He dropped, hit somewhere around the ribs on the left side—one scar more or less made little difference—and lay quiet while he drew from his shoulder holster the long-barreled Colt. The spurt of flame had come from across the room, from behind the bunk where Saunders had evidently been waiting. But no doubt he had moved away at once. It would not be discreet to remain long in one place after shooting at Langdon—not unless one hit him in a more vital spot than the short ribs.

Langdon lay still, holding his breath as much as he could and listening, listening for the least sound that would indicate a target, and holding the revolver poised to shoot quick. He had not expected to find Saunders there. He had come to wait for him. He had intended to settle down behind that bunk and shoot first. Saunders could not be taken alive: he had said so, and he was a man of his word.

Saunders had been on the jump for sixty hours, and Langdon knew it. He had expected him to double back to the cabin. The girl lived just down the gulch, and Langdon knew that she had sent word for him to meet her.

"Sixty hours without sleep," Langdon said to himself as he noiselessly twisted to one side to ease the burning pain that had come. "And he was sure awake when I showed up. Wonder how he knew I wasn't the girl—my boots and limp, I suppose. I just blundered in."

Langdon knew that he must outguess and outshoot Saunders. He was sure at least one of them had to be dead when both left the cabin.

To outshoot Saunders one had to knock the marks from a six-spot at ten paces in less than half that many seconds. But Langdon could do it—when at his best. Just now it seemed that somebody had driven a red-hot poker into his chest below the heart. Guided by sound only, Saunders had shot and missed the heart by less than three inches.

Langdon lay where he had dropped. He must outguess Saunders, and Saunders would expect him to do the natural thing and move away. Too late Langdon realized that he should have groaned for a minute or two, gasped as though the death rattle was in his throat, and then lain quiet as though dead. That might have fooled Saunders—and it might not.

Perhaps Saunders now believed he was dead; but not likely, for in the utter stillness of the room life could almost be sensed. Besides, Saunders knew that if he, Langdon, were dead nothing could be lost by remaining silently alert until dawn came; and if he were not dead, everything would be lost by one incautious movement. Saunders would play the waiting game and use his head.

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Langdon clamped his teeth to hold back the groans that surged toward his lips. It was very nearly more at times than he could do to keep from coughing. The pain grew worse. He put his fingers to his side, then wiped them on his shirt. The left side of the shirt was moist and sticky. It seemed to him that for hour after hour he lay, the gun lifted and ready, the pain gnawing just below his heart. He, too, had to be awake and alert for the dawn; it would be the man with best eyes then that shot first.

The gun grew heavy. He lowered it. He was too rapid on the trigger to need hold it ready like a boy standing over a rabbit hole. It was a relief to lay the gun on the floor, but he kept his fingers resting on the handle. A turn of the wrist and he could have it aimed and fired instantly.

So Jennie had sent word to Saunders to meet her. Langdon turned the thought over and over in his mind. She had known which way he rode and where he was hiding out, and had sent word—and an hour before she had kissed Langdon and told him for the first time that she loved him. Now he understood why she had pled with him to let Saunders escape; had pled with him—the sheriff—to let a murderer get away.

Langdon had understood when he caught the half-breed that worked for her father and made him tell where he was going, and why. And Langdon had let the half-breed go on his way with the message and planned to be at the cabin before Saunders arrived.

Langdon had never heard of Delilah; but he felt that Jennie had played on him as only a devilish-hearted and angel-faced woman can play on a man. He felt no personal regret that Buck Robertson had been killed. Any one of numerous people probably felt that it was rather a good thing, but all were amazed that any one should have done it. Robertson had not only been quick on the trigger himself, but he held the valley in his hand. His herds overran other men's land, and there were few of those men who had protested otherwise than politely and had not been silent when the protests, as they might have known beforehand, got them nothing.

Langdon had no special zeal in catching Saunders because Saunders, too, loved the girl. Duty meant much to Langdon. He had been a deputy in his teens. He had been made sheriff in his late twenties; and he was not without pride in his reputation as a man-getter—not killer, but getter. Saunders was known far and wide as a hot-tempered, impetuous, reckless fellow who had had a good deal of trouble with Robertson's son, Phil.

He might have got away—or stayed on—without any one knowing who had killed Robertson down in the cottonwood grove between the cabin and Washburn's place; but he had ridden up to the Horse Shoe Saloon, gone in, invited everybody up for a drink, then holding his glass high had shouted:

"Well, boys, there's to be a little game of tag, and I'm 'it.' Buck Robertson's cows won't break in on my alfalfa patch again. His body's down there in the grove. I did it. Now get me if you can—but I'll be a dead man when you do."

With that he had leaped through the door, on to his horse and made off, while excited men stamped and shouted back and forth, ran to their horses and raced to the grove—then hit the trail after Saunders. They had ridden hard and kept him on the jump, raising him out of his hiding-places as a rabbit is raised from the brush by hounds; but he had doubled back, dodged in and around and actually came back almost to the starting-place; and with less than a mile in the lead had repassed the Washburn place again.

And Jennie Washburn had lied when Langdon questioned her. Langdon had at first thought that she was mistaken, but now he was sure she had lied. She had said that Saunders came riding past her father's place and turned north toward the mountains. Later Langdon found that he had turned south toward the foothills.

Old man Washburn himself had said that he hadn't seen anything. He had a leg that had withered after a fall from a horse, and got about only on crutches and in a buckboard. He tried hard to make crops grow and pay, but like all small farmers he had stood in Robertson's way and no matter what fences were built the morning came when he found his fields full of cattle.

Langdon had ridden north with the posse. But when there had been no sign of Saunders' trail he had turned back alone. Anyway, he preferred to hunt for men alone. He felt himself to be the match for any, and he didn't like the blundering,

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stupid noise of a posse. He had stopped at the Washburn ranch and Jennie, at last, had told him that she loved him and would marry him. Too, she had spoken of Saunders, said what a good neighbor he had been; and as a woman can when pretending to ask for only a trifle had begged Langdon not to press the search. And an hour later Jennie had sent her messenger south to Saunders, saying—

"Meet me at your cabin in the morning."

Langdon had reached the cabin before midnight; but Saunders waited there even ahead of him.

Langdon wished the pain would grow even sharper, because he felt weak, drowsy. He could stand pain. He had stayed in the saddle for twenty hours once after his knee had been shattered—and he had limped ever since. But he had got his man. Now he had to stay awake till dawn and shoot first if he got his man. He did not want to kill Saunders. But Saunders wanted to kill him. Saunders had not liked him for a long time—not since he had brought Jennie home from the dance the first time. That must have been. . . .

And feebly puzzling his brain for the answer as to how long that had been, Langdon suddenly felt himself sinking away, far away.

HEN he awoke it was daylight, and his hand instinctively snatched at his empty holster, for there almost within reach lay Saunders, sound asleep. His side was painfully stiff and ached, but he began to search about for his revolver.

From behind came a soft voice:

"You keep still, Bob. I've got it. Got his, too. Are you badly hurt? I thought you were both dead—and I nearly fainted. He's asleep and I let you sleep, too. Why did he do it, Bob?"

She stooped over to lay her hand gently on his forehead, but Langdon twisted away, avoiding her hand, and said roughtly—

"Give me back my gun."

"Bob! Why, Bob, what's the matter? You look like you didn't know me."

"I know you all right," he said ominously. "Give me that gun."

Jennie drew back from him, puzzled, surprised.

He tried to get to his feet, but sank down. Then pressing his left hand hard against his side, he swore between tight-gripped teeth, and struggled again till he stood up—but only for a moment. His head reeled, he stumbled, reached out to catch himself against the wall and would have fallen if the girl had not propped him with her shoulder, putting an arm affectionately around him.

"You get away from me," he snarled. And half shoving her, half jerking himself away, he got loose and stumbling forward sat down on a broken chair. "Give me that gun," he said breathing hard and watching the prostrate man who stirred uneasily.

"You won't kill him?" she asked apprehensively.

"No. I won't kill him. He'll have a square trial and if he gets off—then—then you can marry him, Miss Washburn."

"Bob!"

"Oh, I know you made a fool of me so he could get away. I knew he was coming here to meet you—I tried to get here first—and didn't. He took a shot at me as I came through the door; then we both kept quiet and waited for daybreak. The fellow with the best eyes would have won. But he went to sleep—and—and I fainted like a —— girl. Give me that gun."

"Bob, what do you mean?" she asked tensely.

"What I said. Give me that gun. He's waking up. He didn't need to shoot me—that's why he hated me—thought I cut him out with you. But that's neither here nor there. He killed Robertson. That's all I want him for."

"Bob, he didn't kill Robertson."

Langdon merely looked at her and grunted.

"He didn't."

"Next you'll be saying he didn't wing me. I know you love him, Jennie——"

"I don't. I never did. He knows it. Why he shot you, I don't know."

"He knew it was me all right. Could tell by the limp."

"Lots of people limp, Bob. Father and Buck Robertson's boy, Phil. Lots of people."

"He knew it was me," Langdon insisted stubbornly. "But I don't hold that against him. Man that's hiding out is expected to shoot the sheriff. I've been shot before. But I feel so weak, Jen—I mean Miss Washburn."

"Bob, what's the matter with you?"

"Guess I haven't any right to call a lady

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by her first name when she comes to another man's cabin—alone."

Jennie's face grew pale and she trembled slightly.

"Bob," she said quietly, "I'm sorry. Sorry for you. You will never forgive yourself for what you have just said. Yes, Bob, I did send word to Jack to meet me here. And I did try to throw you off his trail. And I did come to meet him—alone. Father made me come. He wanted me to tell Jack that it wasn't any use to hide out any longer because he is going to give himself up. Father killed Robertson himself. He's waiting to give himself up——"

"Jennie!" Langdon cried, humbled and horrified.

"Miss Washburn, please," she said calmly.

Jack Saunders opened sleep-swollen eyes and peered quickly about as though to see something that ought to be on the floor and wasn't. He raised up and them asked suddenly—

"Did I get him, Langdon?"

Langdon was sitting with his head between his hands. He had forgotten Saunders.

"What's that?" he asked, trying to stand and at the same time reaching out to the girl for his gun which she still held.

Saunders again looked over the floor as he said:

"Phil Robertson. Did I drop him? It's a good thing, I guess. He'd 'a' got me this morning. Having to be still that way just naturally put me to sleep. But how'd you get here so quick? Thought you went north with the posse."

Langdon's eyes were hard and narrow as he stared into Saunders' face.

"I guess it's the hemp for me, all right," Saunders went on. "Father and son. It's meant gun-play between Phil and me for a long time. And I was waiting here last night for—for—I come back to get some things I needed, and I heard Phil limping up to the door and I just calculated that he knew I was here——"

"I limp too, Sanders," Langdon said in a cool, soft voice.

"Good God, Langdon—was that you?"

"Yes. You hit me here," and Langdon touched his side.

"Bob, I wouldn't have done that for anything—I wouldn't. You and me haven't been friends, but it wasn't a matter of shooting. Not on my side. Not even to make my getaway. But that tribe of Robertsons——"

"Washburn's confessed, Saunders. You're not wanted any more."

"Washburn's—— Listen, Langdon. I made the bull play. The old man did right. I ought to 'ave let him go in and tell just how it happened. You see, Robertson's cows had got into the barley field. The old man—him a cripple, too, you know—was chasing them out best he could and I was helping at the other side the field, when Robertson came up. I didn't hear what was said, but I saw Robertson hit him with a quirt. Just reached over his saddle and hit Washburn square in the face. The old man was on foot and on crutches, too. And he shot.

"He done right. It was self-defense. I knew it. So I come dashing over, and I said: 'Dad, old boy, you can't ride and I want to leave this country, anyhow. This is my job. Just keep mum, see. The Robertson tribe'd make it hot for you, anyway, and you've got Jennie and the farm. It's my job—and I'll be one man that Langdon didn't get! So I rode into town and shot off my face. But it was hotter work than I expected. But I was doing it for—for—Washburn—and—for Washburn, you know."

A moment of silence, and Langdon rose stiffly, weakly, from his chair and held out his hand as he said:

"Yes. I know, Jack. I know. Good-by. I guess I can get down to the house all right. Me and Washburn'll drive in—and—and—I guess the jury'll do what's right. Just like Washburn did. Good-by. Good-by, Jennie."

He walked out of the cabin. He leaned a little to ease his side, and the sweat of pain stood on his drawn, tense face. But he looked neither to the right nor to the left, and by sheer grit and will he held his legs steady. He was weak. He really ought not to try to go. He knew it. But they wanted to be alone—and so did he.

Langdon reached his horse and started painfully to mount. Then the girl and Saunders came through the door. Saunders came up to him, and looking hard into his face said:

"You've got me wrong, Langdon. I'm leaving the country. Don't bother Washburn a-tall. He done right as you said, so

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let it drop. And," he added, with a glimmer of humor on his thin, twisted lips, "the girl here's got something she wants you to say to her. My horse is hobbled down there in the gully—so jest forget me for a half hour or so."

Langdon again slowly put out his hand, and in silence Saunders took it, then turned away hastily and stumbled off toward the gully.

MISSPELLED

BY BERT VAN

DAVE'S wife told him what she wanted at the store. Dave nodded his head slowly, and walked out to his horse. Dave was a cowpuncher, bashful before the fair sex—even before his wife of a year and a half. Although his soul rebelled against this shopping tour, he was tongue-tied before her. He swung into his saddle and rode down the Curlew trail, humped over as though the weight of the world rested on his shoulders.

"Dang a woman!" he complained to his roan. "They don't stop to think that a man has got any feelings."

He tied his horse to a rack, and went inside a saloon. The bartender greeted him, and automatically set out the bottle.

"How's things, Dave?" he asked.

Dave gulped his liquor, and leaned against the bar.

"Awful, Ed! I got to buy something that I don't want to, but I guess there ain't no time like the present."

He went out and crossed over to Benson's store, but was back in a minute.

"Buy it?" asked the bartender, but Dave shook his head.

"Where is Benson, Ed?"

"Left for the East yesterday. Wife and daughter running the store."

"Uh-huh. That's the —— of it, Ed. Listen." He proceeded to whisper his mission into the bartender's willing ear, and the bartender grinned widely.

"Aw, go on and get the order filled, Dave. That ain't nothing."

Dave nodded, took another drink, and went across the street again.

Pretty soon he slunk back and took another drink.

"I can't do it, Ed," he wailed. "I'll give you five dollars if you'll do it for me."

"Not for forty, Dave."

They talked it all over and, as talking is a dry occupation, they left the bottle in easy reach. Suddenly the bartender grabbed Dave by the arm, and did a double shuffle.

"I got uh good idea, Dave! Listen: I'll write a note to Mrs. Benson and you make believe your wife wrote it. *Sabe?* All yuh got to do is hand her the note and she'll fill the order."

He labored and frowned over the writing for a while, folded up the missive and handed it to Dave.

"You give it to her, Dave, and your troubles are over."

"Ed," wailed Dave, "you're the best friend I ever had. I'll do the same for you some time."

He weaved across the street and entered the store. Mrs. Benson, a motherly old lady, came forward and peered at Dave over the tops of her glasses.

"Did you wish something?" she asked.

Dave hauled out the paper in triumph, and while she read it, he gazed at the ceiling and whistled between his shut teeth.

Miss Benson came from the back of the store and read the paper over her mother's shoulder. Dave fidgeted.

"My Dear Mrs. Benson:" read the old lady, aloud. "Will you please give Dave six things for a baby. I don't know how to spell them. Yours sincerely, Mrs. Dave Smith."

"Queer order, isn't it, mother," wondered the young lady, and Dave snorted.

"Six things," pronounced the old lady. "I—I suppose we'll have to use our own judgment, Mr. Smith."

"Uh-huh," agreed Dave. "Yes'm. You're the doctor."

Thirty minutes later Dave sat on his roan along the trail and opened a bundle. He piled a baby's hood, mittens, two white dresses, pair of shoes and a woolly blanket on the pommel of his saddle. He gazed at his purchases and cursed softly.

"Dang all uneducated bartenders to thunder," he groaned. "Ignorant hooch-handlers! Couldn't spell half-a-dozen diapers."

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DIRTY JIM

A Complete Novelette

by S.B.H. Hurst

Author of "Flotsam," "The Waters under the Earth," etc.

THE lawlessness north of certain latitudes is a favorite theme for song and story and men talk of the "good old days" when vice ruled and decency was weakness; but the wildest bad man whose voice ever woke unpleasant echoes among the frozen solitudes would have seemed a mere student in villainy among the more intelligent blackguards of the South Seas.

Even today there are things done on the islands that would make many Alaskan toughs shudder; and back in the early '80's, when the strong captains of the swift trading schooners were monarchs, when blackbirding was considered a legitimate speculation, and there were places not on the charts—long ago, it seems, when Polynesia was a paradise bossed by excellent imitations of the devil—such incidents as have made mining-camps famous for their wickedness would have been passed by as unworthy of record.

Out of this flood of iniquity some faint tales have come to the world and a few faces stare grotesquely through the fog of the years as if seeking recognition, hurt at being forgotten. Men like Tom Spritz and "Bully" Haynes, with their satellites "Sydney Dick" and George Mullens—these, smothered among the dead bones of their many atrocities, sometimes manage, as it were, to push forth a wilted hand, which is feebly waved.

NATURE had been more than usually lavish with the island. Even the coral animals who labored through the centuries to build its foundation saw to it that their efforts should result in a perfect mirror of a harbor with a sufficient opening in the most useful place for sailing vessels. After that they gave the word to their descendants that they should surround Talee with numerous other islands, which should be perfect nests for shell and other things valuable to the pirates who would go there to trade. And the entire beauty of it all was beyond any painting.

But Tom Spritz was not interested in beauty unless it was kissable. The son of a Sydney convict, all the worst of his father was accentuated in him with an added cunning that made him doubly dangerous. He sat aft under the awning of his schooner, smiling slightly as he went over the details of a plan which had resulted from a most unusual situation.

Nearby two more schooners lay at their anchors, the *Mary*, Captain Bill Nugent, and the *Full Hand*, Captain Ezra Miller, the former an Englishman and the latter claiming American citizenship—a claim Washington would have probably disallowed. These, with Spritz's *Lady Ellen*, divided all the trade of the locality, the three men having made a defensive and offensive alliance which did not hesitate to make

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war upon any other vessel that ventured to enter the harbor.

And such was the terror of these men's names that not a man among all the ruffians of the islands cared to risk the chance of trading at Talee—most of them, however, having their own particular places similarly protected by similar alliances.

Suddenly Spritz lifted a pair of binoculars and trained them upon the beach. Outside the shack of "Dirty Jim" a man and woman were apparently talking. With a satisfied grunt Spritz laid aside the glasses and lit his pipe. Then he went back to his planning, trying by bringing in Dirty Jim as an added factor to make his scheme the more workable.

This Dirty Jim was a nobody from nowhere who spoke with the cultured drawl of Oxford but whose appearance—take your most extreme conception of a degenerate beach-comber, incurable drunkard, poverty-stricken sufferer from hook-worm, down-at-the-heel *Robinson Crusoe*, useless piece of human flotsam, and anything else sufficiently unpleasant. Add all these together, multiply the result by ten, and you will faintly approximate the appearance of the individual with the unpleasant sobriquet.

But one positive virtue he had—he never bothered with the native women. Otherwise, he never worked, food being obtainable for the mere trouble of getting it; and he was always drunk on cheap trade gin which the few white men gave him in unlimited quantities so as to be rid of him.

But Captain Spritz had seen him talking to a woman, and the sight had given the captain pleasure. For the woman was the cause of the captain's planning, and her presence on Talee was, to say the least, remarkable.

Young, about twenty-four, she had money enough of her own to live comfortably in England. But being an orphan without a living relative, she lacked an outlet for her affections—the right man not having put in an appearance—and consequently she became possessed of the notion that she had a mission in life. For a time the mission hovered in her mind in a nebulous state, with a strong religious coloring. And then she joined the Salvation Army, which at that time was a new organization and subject to unpleasant persecution.

Looking back it seems strange that in well-policed England no or very little protection was afforded this religious body from the bricks and dead cats of the toughs of the towns where it held its meetings. Perhaps it was this element of martyrdom that attracted the girl, Katie Wood. And then, as if the roughs of England were too peaceful for her, she determined to spread the Army's teachings over-seas. So she got out her atlas and happened upon that speck on the map marked Talee—reaching there by hazardous journeyings via Australia.

But Talee, ruled by Spritz, Nugent and Miller, had long before warned off the missionaries—who with incomprehensible cowardice and thoughtlessness had given the girl a passage to the island in their schooner with only text-bordered warnings concerning what she could expect. And once there she found no one to listen to her kindly teachings but Dirty Jim, who was usually too drunk to understand what she said.

Then came Tom Spritz, six-feet-two and weighing two hundred and fifty pounds in hard condition. He saw the girl and she looked good to him. But even Spritz, in the year 1885, did not care to steal the girl in broad daylight. Not that it was likely that any one would attempt to stop him, but there was a vague, indefinable something, inspired by neither fear nor caution, which made it appear advisable to kidnap her during the night. Wherefore he smiled and found his plan was good.

But he had neglected to remember that to his allies also morality was a myth and decency a legend and that their eyes must have fallen upon the girl with intent far from religious. One can not expect proper restraint from his chosen associates if one is so tough as to boast habitually of using broken bottles for—face powder; and consequently Tom Spritz, when his two friends rowed over to pay him a visit, found himself doubting if after all an alliance were as profitable as a lone hand.

IT WAS Nugent who genially brought up the subject—and it was said of him that he could laugh pleasantly while throwing his best friend to the sharks—wagging his great blond head with the zest of it.

"We've bet on it," he bellowed as the

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boat came alongside. "If you haven't, I lose—but you won't say you haven't."

"Bet on what?" Spritz leaned over the rail with interest.

"Well, not exactly bet—because we both want to bet the same way. Wait till we get aboard—tell you then, you old pirate!"

Nugent heaved himself over the low rail, chuckling violently.

The captain's servant brought drinks and set chairs around the table under the after awning. While he was doing this the two visitors talked generalities only. Not that there was any danger of the boy's repeating what they said, even if he had understood, but the same feeling that had caused Captain Spritz to plan a certain enterprise for the night-time demanded an unnecessary secrecy of the visitors—they were living their lives outside the grip of civilization, but the shadow of its customs and laws lay unpleasantly upon their souls.

"Now—" Nugent's face rippled with smiles—"bet you 'most anything, Tom, that you're scheming to get that missionary girl away from here—before me and this other rascal Miller can lay our hands on her. How about it?"

Tom Spritz could have cheerfully shot his engaging friend, but his face showed nothing but surprize. He dissembled ingeniously. Why should he bother about the girl? Better to let her alone, he thought. One could always do what one wanted to with missionaries, but they had a beastly habit of squealing. Then the people back in England started to raise —— and first thing you knew a man-of-war fired a shot across your bows and then there was the devil to pay. He was not sure, of course, but he believed it meant imprisonment for life.

"What does?" the lank-haired Miller leered.

"Why—" Spritz tried to appear unconcerned—"why—kidnaping a girl. A white girl, anyway."

"Well," Miller laughed, "nobody said anything about doing that. All Bill said was about taking her away from here—like as if the island wasn't healthy."

Nugent roared.

"You showed your hand, Tom. Come on, now, own up. You was figuring all the time, just as we were, to grab that girl for yourself. Of course we know it's against the law. Only—" he lowered his voice—"it's a hanging offense under the British law."

"But who's to know about it?" Spritz admitted his interest without further quibble.

"That's it," Miller leaned forward and spoke with confidence. "We can say she came aboard of her own free will if she makes a fuss. But it ain't likely she'll make a fuss after she's put in a week or so aboard. The point is, who's to have her? We all can't."

"That's what we came over to talk about," amended Nugent.

The three men stared at one another. Clean-shaven and nattily dressed as they were, they were nevertheless lineal descendants of the sea-robbers of past times, and some of the things they did would have turned their ancestors green with envy.

They couldn't all have the girl, that was obvious. So who was to be the lucky man? And even if some decision were arrived at—if it were decided which of them should sail with the girl in his cabin, could that one trust the other two to keep their words and keep their hands off? Fighting would be foolish. The winner would be too badly hurt to enjoy his honeymoon. How were they to decide?

"There are the three of us," Bill Nugent spoke slowly. "One of us sails tonight with that girl aboard his schooner. The other two agrees to keep their hands off and their heads shut, eh?"

"Certainly," chorused the other two in unison.

"Well, then—" there was a dubious note to Nugent's voice—"how will we settle it—cards or dice?"

"'Once aboard the lugger, the girl is mine.'"

The sarcastic manner in which Spritz made the ancient quotation was like a searchlight thrown on his mind. His companions laughed as a matter of course but a moment later their eyes met significantly. Tom Spritz was furious. He had been planning to get the girl when they came on board. And when Tom was mad he didn't let a little thing like an agreement stand in his way. He would bear watching. But the thing to do was to act as if they trusted him.

"Cards—stud-poker." Miller played the game well.

"How do you mean?" Nugent, who

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really meant to act fairly once the infamous pact was made, was interested.

"I'll tell you," went on Miller. "We each take ten chips. Each chip has the same value. We play stud—freeze-out. The man sticking longest wins the right to swipe the girl. If he doesn't manage to get her in twenty-four hours he loses his chance and anybody can get her who wants to."

"Freeze-out seems a —— of a long game." Nugent spoke as if the stake was the next drink.

"Oh, it's fast enough playing stud. Everybody has to ante each deal—if a man don't win a pot in ten deals, even if he don't make a bet, he's broke."

"You're quite a mathematician," snarled Spritz, who appeared to be on the verge of refusing to play.

"I'm quite a poker-player," retorted Miller, stroking his long black mustache complacently.

"Oh, all right. Boy!" Spritz called, and his servant came running. "Bring cards and chips. I can play a bit myself."

"And I don't call myself exactly a fool," Nugent smiled as usual.

If it is possible to imagine a satyr being fat, Nugent was a far satyr.

There was a touch of the unreal about everything. The harbor was so calm that the shadows of late afternoon lay unrippled upon it, and the fact that the three schooners were as devoid of movement as the island itself gave the scene the appearance of a picture. One could easily have looked at it and believed that there would never be any change, never any movement—that it would look as it did for years, until the picture wore off the canvas.

And the actions of the three men under the awning of the *Lady Ellen* were stagy. The stake was so unusual that the game might have been arranged by the keeper of three lunatics to keep them amused. While each man was determined to do his best to win, not one of them believed the winner would gain anything tangible—so little trust did they have in one another.

In fact, if there were anything at all at stake it was the off-chance that the losers would keep their words.

Even Nugent, who had intended to play fairly, decided that he would be a fool to do so. But Nugent's character was far too complex for a superficial analysis. And yet the men were as serious and intent as any three men might be who delighted in stud-poker; Miller giving each man ten chips, taking ten himself, then ostentatiously closing the box. After which he directed the boy to take the box, with the remaining chips, back to the cabin.

"FIRST jack deals."

He began to deal 'round the cards, the first jack falling to Spritz.

"Your deal, Tom." He pushed the scattered cards across the table. "Got a hunch you're going to have bad luck."

Spritz raised his head—it looked as if it had been carved out of a block of teakwood by a patient but inartistic savage—and the peculiar smolder in his eyes seemed to increase like a fire blown into flame by the wind.

"Do you? Well, I know you feel quite upset about it, don't you?"

Miller could meet those eyes only with an effort; the brutish force of them cowed his fox-like nature. He laughed queerly.

"Well, deal 'em."

"When I'm —— good and ready," Spritz snarled.

"Now, now, boys." The laughing Nugent, who would have been delighted if his companions had shot one another, mimicked distress at their quarrel. "Remember we're sort of partners in business—what they call allies."

"Yes," retorted Spritz with blunt honesty, "yes, we're allies because one of us alone ain't heavy enough to stop others from trading here."

"Cut the cards, Bill. Everybody ante," Miller interjected.

Spritz, about to deal the first card, paused, squeezing the pack between his huge paws.

"Seems to me you're trying to run things?"

"Well, is everybody to ante, or not?"

"Everybody ante, of course—but you don't have to tell us."

Miller was a long way from being a coward, but a profitless quarrel did not appeal to his intelligence. He therefore made no answer, in spite of Nugent's questioning glances—Nugent being quite ready to take sides against the bullying Spritz—contenting himself with lighting a cigar.

Then Spritz dealt the cards, three exposed

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and three buried. He looked at his hole-card, and turned his exposed card face down—passing out, having only a deuce and a seven. He picked up the pack, waiting to deal when the others had made their bets. Miller's exposed card was a six-spot, Nugent's was a jack.

"You're high," Miller remarked.

"I see I am."

Nugent had looked at his hole-card, and was now studying his opponent.

"Bet a couple," he added suddenly.

"See it."

Miller pushed two chips toward the center of the table and nodded to Spritz, who dealt again.

This time he dealt Nugent another jack, and Miller a seven. It looked like a good place for Captain Miller to get out, but when Nugent, apparently trying to coax him along, bet one chip, Miller at once pushed one chip to the center, grinning at Spritz's look of surprize as the latter began to deal again.

The deal gave Nugent a queen and Miller another six. Nugent was still high with a pair of jacks and a queen in sight against his opponent's pair of sixes and a seven; and it looked, unless Miller quit, as if he would be trusting to his luck to "draw out."

A bit annoyed at having as he thought coaxed his opponent to stay and better his hand, Nugent now decided rather thoughtlessly to make him pay to stay. He accordingly bet four of his remaining six chips. To his surprize and secret alarm Miller at once saw the bet, and Spritz dealt the last two cards—Nugent a four and Miller a ten. Nugent was still high in sight, and it was therefore his bet.

"Well," Miller sneered slightly, "what are you going to do?"

Nugent was watching him closely.

"Allowed a bit of time, ain't I?" he asked nastily, sparring for that useful commodity.

"All you want," Miller puffed deeply at his cigar, and grinned as he looked at the exposed cards.

Nugent was thinking. All he had of value was the pair of jacks—his hole-card being a deuce. Of course, he had Miller beaten in sight, for Miller only showed a pair of sixes. But what had he in the hole? There was the point and the little detail which raises stud-poker to the height of one of the greatest games in the world—its brother draw being of as low a scientific order as roulette.

Nugent could see every card in his opponent's hand but one, just as Miller could see all of Nugent's cards but one. But Miller appeared to be confident of the issue, while Nugent was not. Yet Nugent knew he had the best hand unless Miller's hole-card was a six, a seven or a ten. If a six, he had three sixes; if a seven or a ten, he held two pair—in either case enough to beat Nugent.

But then the chances in Nugent's favor were the better—for he certainly had the highest pair. But Miller's confident manner, and his ready calling, made it appear that his hole-card improved his hand. On the contrary, unless Nugent was a player of a rare sort, his hesitancy at this last bet was proof that he had nothing but the pair of jacks.

"I check," Nugent spoke suddenly, meaning he passed the bet to his opponent—about the best thing he could do after waiting so long, and taking into account the limited number of chips.

Miller at once pushed his remaining chips to the middle of the table. He didn't say a word.

Nugent shifted about in his chair uneasily. Spritz leaned forward, interested. The game had gripped the players—not one of them was thinking about the stake. Nugent sought Miller's eyes as if to read through them the secret of his hole-card. Then, still keeping his eyes on Miller's, he lifted his remaining chips as if to bet them.

"Sure you don't want to draw down, Miller?" he asked, his voice quavering slightly with excitement.

"Quite sure." Miller was laconic.

And Nugent shook his head, with a forced smile, retaining his chips on his side of the table.

"I won't bet 'em," he snarled. "You've got either two pair or threes. Take the pot."

Miller, with a slightly insulting gesture, raked in the pot; and as he pushed his cards away he turned over the buried one. It was an ace.

"——!" Nugent was furious. "I had you beat."

"Why didn't you call, then?"

Miller began to stack his chips, while the other, on the verge of starting a row,

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slammed the cards together and began to shuffle clumsily. Spritz laughed shortly.

"You ought to have called," he advised.

"The ——! I suppose you would?"

"Of course—anybody could see he was bluffing," returned Spritz.

"Well, we'll see. But you can never tell how a hand looks unless you're playing it."

He anteed one of his two chips, and pushed the pack to Miller to be cut. It looked as if Captain Nugent would have to play not only very good stud-poker but also play in very good luck if he were to have the privilege of kidnaping the Salvation Army girl. And he was more angry than he wanted to appear.

It was not the first time Miller had outwitted him. There were matters of trade, and other things, studding the years of their acquaintance, which irked when they came to the surface of consciousness. His face flushed until the blood could be seen creeping under his blond hair. Miller, on the contrary, was cool and comfortable. It was a favorite pose of his to seem unmoved by success. He pulled deliberately at his mustache.

"Cut," repeated Nugent.

"Might be a good idea." Miller's tone was silky, but it made Nugent the more savage, as it was meant to do.

Nugent dealt the cards, giving himself an ace and a king—above the average hand. But he was cautious. He had only one chip left after the ante, and he hoped for at least a pair when he was forced to ask for a show-down. So he passed, remarking that he would—

"Just deal this hand, and watch."

And now Tom Spritz determined to show that he knew the game. The fact of his having a pair of aces back to back—the best hand he could possibly hold at that stage of the deal—helped him to that determination. It was true that he only had eight chips in his stack against Miller's seventeen, but, to use an old saying, he had chips enough for a good player.

Miller had a queen in sight and it was up to Tom to bet. He bet two chips and Miller called. Nugent gave each man another card—Miller another queen, Spritz a ten.

"Big hands out, eh, Tom?" Miller spoke genially.

"You bet," Spritz grinned back, and bet another chip, which Miller called.

THEN Nugent dealt Spritz another ten and Miller a four. Spritz laughed loudly. He had aces up while Miller only had a pair of queens in sight, with a four. It looked like a cinch. He pushed all his chips to the center, but Miller saw them without hesitating.

"The ——!" cried Spritz. "It's a show-down, you know—but you've got lots of chips."

He turned over his hole-card, showing that he had two pair. But Miller, without a sound, showed a queen in the hole—three queens, the better hand.

"For God's sake!" Spritz cried to Nugent. "Give me another ace, Bill."

"I'll do my best," Nugent laughed as usual, but he only dealt a six to Spritz and then as if to add insult to injury gave Miller another four, making a full hand.

"Like killing a louse with a hundred-ton gun," remarked Miller as he raked in the pot.

Spritz, his fists clenched, was ready to spring at Miller's throat, but a certain idea restrained him.

"Guess I'm out of it," he remarked as quietly as he could. "Well, you chaps will stay to supper."

They remonstrated, each anxi us to win and get away. But Spritz insisted.

"Besides," he added, "it may take some time for this game to finish."

"Don't look like it when I look at my stack," answered Nugent with affected sorrow. "But where are you going, Tom?"

"Got to speak to the mate," replied Spritz, getting out of his chair.

"Going to his room to weep," grinned Miller.

"Don't you wish you had a chance of being a bridegroom, like us, Tom?"

Spritz laughed quite naturally.

"I told you I hadn't thought of it before you fellows came aboard," he lied as he left the poop.

"The —— he didn't." Miller was shuffling the cards. "Now, I wonder what he's going to speak to Sydney Dick about?"

"What does it matter?" returned Nugent cheerfully. "Dick's probably drunk."

But Sydney Dick was not drunk, and to him the word of Spritz was above any law. The orders he received that afternoon were unusual, but he accepted them as if he were not a bit surprized—which he wasn't. Then Spritz went back to his guests.

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The game had changed somewhat. When Spritz left Nugent had only a chip left, hence a show-down for the ante was in order. But Nugent's luck had come to his rescue—for freeze-out is not poker in the legitimate sense of the word—and when Spritz returned from his conference with his mate Nugent had five chips in front of him and was shuffling the cards to deal. Miller, of course, had twenty-five chips.

Nugent dealt, and it was his bet—he having a king in sight, and Miller a nine. Nugent bet one chip, but Miller, perhaps intending to force matters, raised him four. For a moment Nugent hesitated—lifting his hole-card and looking at it in the curious way stud-players do when they know quite well what the card is—then he pushed his four remaining chips to the middle of the table.

"Might as well turn 'em face up—it's another show-down," suggested Miller.

Nugent did not answer. He turned over his hole-card, showing the queen of spades. Miller did the same, showing another nine. The odds were all in favor of Miller: two nines against a king and a queen of different suits. Then Nugent dealt Miller another nine, cursing as he did so, and dealt himself the ten of clubs. The game appeared to be over and Miller pretended to rake in the chips.

"Hold on!" rasped Nugent. You haven't won yet."

"Pretty near, though," interrupted Spritz, dropping heavily into his chair.

Nugent glared, but did not reply. Then his face cleared and very deliberately he dealt again, giving his opponent the ace of hearts and himself the ace of diamonds.

"Might be worse," he grunted.

"Don't see that you've got anything. Just a straight, open in the middle," retorted Miller. "But deal the —— things —what are you waiting for?"

"This." Nugent dealt with one of those curious prophetic feelings of certainty called a sure hunch, giving Miller the two of spades and himself the jack of the same suit.

"Funny, ain't it?" he laughed as he scooped the chips over to his side; and as he spoke he felt sure that he was going to beat Miller at stud—to do which was worth more than getting the girl, at that moment.

But Miller had still the greater number of chips, which perhaps caused him to overbet his hand. At any rate when Nugent, chuckling with confidence and delight, again shuffled the cards, his stack showed twenty-two chips to Miller's eight.

But Miller was apparently unmoved. He considered himself the better player and attributed Nugent's winnings to an extraordinary run of luck. If he played carefully, Nugent could never win.

But Nugent had no intention of letting him play carefully. Feeling sure that the luck was on his side, he bet the size of Miller's stack on the first card; and Miller, with a pair of tens back to back, was in a quandary. Nugent's card was an ace—what had he in the hole? Two tens was above the average hand, and the play, ordinarily, was to call Nugent's bet. But to do so meant all Miller's chips. And Nugent might have a pair of aces.

"Oh, bet 'em—what's the matter with you?" asked Spritz impatiently.

"Who's playing this hand?" asked Miller nastily.

"That's so," agreed Nugent unexpectedly. "I have an ace in the hole, you know."

"I think so," admitted Miller, turning down his card.

"Ha, ha!" Nugent laughed loudly, disregarding the fact that he had only one chip belonging to his opponent in the pot he took in. "Got you that time—measly little deuce in the hole—you had me beat. Ha, ha! Where's your nerve?"

Miller did not answer, but Spritz reminded Nugent about the time he had laid down a pair of jacks, and an argument began which Miller terminated by saying sharply as he offered the pack—

"Cut!"

Nugent cut the cards and Miller began to deal. The luck appeared to be changing, for Nugent's exposed card was a two of spades while Miller's was an ace of the same suit. Both men looked at their hole-cards and then Miller pushed all his chips into the pot. Nugent called, and Miller, since it was a show-down, turned over his hole-card, showing another ace. Nugent, with what looked like foolish obstinacy, refused to show his hole-card.

"Go on, what have you got, Bill?" cried Spritz eagerly.

"I don't have to show unless I want till the hand's dealt," snapped Nugent.

"Not even got another deuce," sneered Spritz.

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But Nugent continued obstinate and Miller dealt him another deuce and gave himself another ace, at which Spritz laughed again.

"Three aces. Not so bad, eh, Miller? Bill has a couple of two spots and a three in the hole—see if he hasn't. But when is this crazy game going to end?"

As there was no further betting to be done, Miller continued dealing, giving himself the unusually large hand of an ace full on sevens. He looked at Nugent, whose exposed cards were three deuces and the king of clubs—also a large hand, but one that looked small against the ace full.

"Shall I take the pot, or have you something in the hole to beat me?" drawled Miller, who knew that there was only one card that could beat him.

"Nugent has four deuces. Don't steal the pot, Miller," broke in Spritz sarcastically.

Nugent smiled.

"You want to be careful, Tom, or people won't know you."

"How?"

Spritz was somewhat puzzled.

"Won't know you—because of your telling the truth," chuckled Nugent, turning over his hole-card and showing the fourth deuce; the others gasping as he ostentatiously raked in all the chips.

"You fellows want to put our agreement in writing?" he asked with curious quietness.

"What for?"

Miller was about to argue the point—bristling over his defeat—when Spritz broke in:

"Writing—what for? You're welcome to the —— girl, for all of me. As I told you, I'm not interested in her—just played to pass the time. Kidnaping a white woman looks a bit too dangerous, the more I think about it. Wish you joy all the same, Bill, and no hard feelings. Course I won't say nothing, and if you get into a mess come to me and I'll do all I can to help you. You will, too, won't you, Miller?" he asked with the heartiness of a disinterested friend.

"I'm with you," Miller agreed. "Let's drink the bridegroom's health."

So, illustrating the inevitability of natural law, these three exponents of the doctrine of force little dreamed that years later a nation called Germany, bred to the same doctrine, would end in the same direction—the satisfaction of lust.

II

DIRTY JIM sat outside his shack, sober but shaky, balancing the ledger of his thirty years of life; thinking chiefly how very long it was since he was respected as Jim Annesty, since he rowed stroke in the Oxford boat in that memorable race when the dark blue crept up from behind and won by a quarter of a length. Why had he fallen so low, he wondered—wondered in vain, for this was during the days—unhappily lingering yet in certain places—when drunkenness was called vice instead of disease.

One hundred years before Christian England, in Bedlam, had treated the insane as if they were responsible for their condition—with inconceivable brutality—and the same barbarity considered Jim a drunken brute when he was a sick man. So no one had offered to help him when ancestral tendencies broke out in him just as turberculosis might have manifested itself.

No one but little Miss Wood, that wonderfully sympathetic and curiously charming young lady with such novel views on religious subjects—views, however, which only penetrated into poor Jim's mind as sunlight penetrates into muddy water. But the poor chap had come to worship her as saints are worshiped, and out of that worship was growing a desire to be better—not the mere wish common to all sufferers from alcohol or drugs, but a desire which demanded satisfaction in effort and self-help.

The spice-scented darkness of the island was soothing, and the faint murmur of the sea against the beach was like a lullaby. As Captain Spritz had observed, Miss Wood, the Salvation Army girl, had talked nearly all afternoon to the beach-comber. She had talked as a kindly sister, and Jim had listened. And now he looked up at the stars apparently staring at him from a moonless sky, and smiled.

He had found one resolve he could surely keep—even if he must have drink, he could at least be a gentleman about it: he could keep himself clean-shaved, and his clothing decent. He went into his shack, lit the battered lamp, shaved, and with difficulty trimmed his hair. Then he got out his one pongee suit and silk shirt and dressed himself, finding in it a delight to which

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he had long been a stranger. The feel of his smooth cheek under his hand was inspiring, the touch of clean clothes against his bathed body was luxurious. Never again would he look otherwise than he did then. Like a child pleased with a new toy he lay down to sleep on his cot—fully dressed.

AND as Jim Annesty closed his eyes, Captain Spritz, sitting at the head of his table, winked pleasantly at Sydney Dick and looked mockingly at his two guests—whose heavy snores almost shook the little cabin.

"Pretty easy, eh?"

"Yes, and they never expected it. They just swallowed dope and drink like as if they wanted a good sleep." Sydney Dick laughed at his wit.

"All right," Spritz went on. "Just tie 'em up good, in case they wake, and put them in the spare room. You sent their boat back?"

"Yes, sir—told the *serang* that when I signaled he was to come for the *Tuans*."

"I wonder what they'll say tomorrow?" mused Spritz. "But never mind. I'm going ashore now. I want two good men in the boat. Soon as I come alongside hoist the signal. Then dump these sleepers into their boat, lift the mud-hook and bring her to the wind. Better heave short after I go ashore—there's no drag worth speaking of."

"All right, sir." Sydney Dick was as interested as his captain, for the reason that any form of villainy charmed him.

Then Tom Spritz had a couple of his men row him ashore. He might have been going to gather flowers so little was he spiritually disturbed. Which causes one to think sometimes that there are automatons in the world without souls, yet clothed in the guise of men, set there by Omnipotence to frighten us by their wickedness into better ways of life.

JIM ANNESTY was dreaming. He was in a lovely old-fashioned garden, lavish with such blossoms as sweet-williams, mignonette, English wall-flowers, and violets. The high walls were overgrown with ivy and the shade was soothing. And near the walls were several fruit-trees, from which he might take whatever fruit he desired. But he was surprized to find that he did not want any fruit, although he knew very well it was good for him; and he became restless, wandering about disconsolate, because there was something he wanted that the garden did not contain; and presently he found the gate, over which was an arch, and he opened the gate and saw that the arch was studded with gin bottles in such a way that the bottles spelled the word "Katie."

Then he heard a woman weeping and he went into the garden and found the Salvation Army girl weeping bitterly because he loved the bottles over the gate more than he loved her. Then, in the silly way of dreams, he began to explain that it really did not matter—as long as he loved Katie what did it matter whether she was an array of bottles or a woman.

But to please her he said he would destroy the bottles and love her instead—it was only an unimportant detail, after all. So he raised his gun—in some way the gun got into his hand—and began to shoot the bottles off the arch; and at his first shot the girl screamed and ....

Annesty woke up, sitting up on his cot, trembling and staring into the darkness. Then, moved by something beyond him, he pulled on his shoes and went outside his shack.

The night had grown very dark, clouds covering the stars. The world was still except down on the shingle about fifty yards from where Annesty stood shivering from his sudden waking. There a big man whom the beach-comber recognized in a moment was lifting into a boat something that struggled vainly. It was like an unreal picture made by shadows which changes as one watches into half-imagined shapes. Then the boat pushed off and began to row toward the *Lady Ellen*.

So the cry in the dream had been real. Annesty realized this, as he stood there, with the semi-paralyzed nerves of the alcoholic and with his mind, long unaccustomed to making a decision, wavering between half a dozen possibilities of action.

He could not see who the woman was. But there was only one girl on the island whom Spritz would be compelled to take aboard his schooner in this fashion and at this hour. Apart from the suggestive influence of the dream, cold logic pointed to the Salvation Army girl as the prisoner in the rapidly moving boat.

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And who on the island would risk the wrath of Tom Spritz by attempting a rescue? Even if there were time to find some man—for Annesty knew Spritz would put to sea at once—it would be useless. For what was the use of tackling Spritz on board his own ship without half a dozen well-armed and determined men? And the beach-comber doubted that there was any one on Talee who cared whether Spritz kidnaped the girl or not.

The moving boat left a stirring track of phosphorescence, which Annesty watched with a sort of stupid sorrow; and then like a hypodermic injection that takes effect the picture of the struggling girl being hustled into the boat stirred the right depth of the reservoir of Annesty's subconscious mind, and he reacted with a quiver of anger.

Deep in that tank of his ancestors' experiences was a memory—perhaps of a gorilla-like creature who had suddenly found his mate struggling in the arms of his rival. And that ancestor possessed Jim Annesty—recharging his nervous system with the vitality of an anger that sees red.

Half a dozen years before he had been a great athlete, but he had never known such a strength as he knew that night. He acted with a purpose and certainty that he caught himself wondering at—as if he were a spectator, as if he had relinquished the body of Jim Annesty to some one else, who was performing marvels in it. And the first glimpse he had of himself was when he was swimming swiftly but cautiously toward the schooner because he had no boat.

The boat reached the schooner as Annesty swam and her shadow against the faint sky light showed her ready for sea—her sails hoisted and shaking in what little wind came into the harbor; and Annesty knew that the mere flap of her sails would take the schooner through the water faster than he could swim. So he doubled his efforts, careless now about being seen. Then another boat rowed swiftly past him and so close that he had to dive to hide himself; and this boat, to his great surprize, was also making for the *Lady Ellen*.

From the schooner came a confused hum of voices. Annesty swam into the dark made by her quarter and saw something being dumped unceremoniously into the second boat while other men were hoisting the first to its tiny davits. As he treaded water, he puzzled about this second boat but could find no answer—knowing nothing, of course, about the unhappy condition of Captains Miller and Nugent. Then he heard a voice—the deep voice of Spritz—whispering hoarsely:

"All right, *Serang*, take 'em aboard. Up with the mud-hook, Dick."

Then the second boat swung off into the darkness.

Very cautiously Jim Annesty swam to where the rail was lowest, keeping as close to the ship as he could to avoid being noticed. He was thinking furiously. Spritz would have locked the girl in his cabin, intending to leave her there till he worked the schooner into deep water. Until then she was safe.

Sydney Dick and most of the crew were now on the forecastle—getting the anchor up. Spritz would be aft on the poop. The awning had been furled. To find some sort of weapon, then to find the girl and wait with her until Spritz came—this was Annesty's plan. But the greatest difficulty lay in getting on board without being seen.

Hugging the schooner's side, Annesty listened to the clank of the cable as it came over the windlass. This lasted a few minutes only—the anchor having been hove short before Spritz came aboard. Then Sydney Dick called aft and Spritz answered. There was the sound of men running along the deck to the halliards, the schooner heeled slightly, and Annesty realized she was under way. He must get aboard now or never.

He rested one hand on the moulding, made a spring and caught the edge of the rail; then he brought up his other hand and raised himself until his eyes were above the rail and he could see along the decks. He had been on board the schooner several times and knew his way about. For a few moments he watched carefully. Then he swung himself over the rail and ran swiftly aft to the cabin.

He stood in the alleyway, breathing hard, the awful reaction of collapse clutching at his weakened physique. The sudden impulse of courage that had sent him swimming to the schooner had left him and only the trembling of unusual overexertion remained. All about the ship

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men were running to the shouted orders of Spritz and his mate. And then Annesty remembered that he had forgotten to pick up a weapon.

The schooner was gliding through the water. In a few moments Spritz would leave the deck. For one horrible moment Jim Annesty wished he had not come and thought of slipping over the rail again. Then the man he used to be came to his help and he stepped out to the pin-rail and selected a wooden belaying-pin—a very useful weapon.

He slipped back into the alleyway and began to walk aft to the captain's cabin. On either side as he went along the curtain-doors of other cabins caused him to hesitate. Sydney Dick he knew to be on deck, but the steward and perhaps a clerk might be behind one of these curtains. But nobody came out or got in his way, and trembling like a leaf, he reached the main cabin.

The table with its fixed chairs was in the center and the swinging lamp showed that everything had been cleaned away since dinner. Opening off the main cabin were four doors. One was the bathroom, in one Spritz kept his chronometers and charts, in one of the others he slept, and the other was a spare room. In one of the latter two the girl was probably confined.

It was less than a minute since Annesty had left the water, although he had the feeling that much had happened to him. Now, clutching his belaying-pin, he went to the door of Spritz's sleeping-room and knocked lightly.

THERE was no answer, but it seemed that a low undercurrent of sound suddenly ceased. What had that sound been? He had noticed it half-consciously when he first entered the main cabin.

Again he tapped lightly on the cabin door and then—half a gasp, half a sigh, and wholly terrified—a voice feebly answered, "Yes" and Annesty understood that the low sound had been the girl's sobbing.

"It's me—Annesty—I want to help you," he whispered.

"Yes," came back eagerly.

"Are you locked in there?"

"Yes, and that big man must have the key."

Annesty fought with his diseased nerves. He wanted calm—calm, so he could think. The situation was exceedingly dangerous. Every hand on the schooner would be against him and Spritz would throw him overboard and think nothing about doing it. And the girl's position was worse—for after all Annesty had only his life to lose. He had hoped to get into the cabin where the girl was confined—to hide behind the door and strike Spritz down with the belaying-pin when he came.

But what could he do now? He looked about desperately. To break down the door would be foolish, even if possible. The broken lock would only serve to warn Spritz. And the minutes were passing. Spritz would be down very soon. Annesty walked rapidly to the room where Spritz kept his charts. Inside in a rack over the wash-stand was a bottle of whisky. With trembling hands, Annesty reached for it and took the drink he needed.

The swim and the unusual strain had taken a lot out of him. But he wisely limited himself to the amount he required as a stimulant. He felt better—able to plan. He thought of boldly taking the whisky out to the main cabin table, sitting down and pretending to be drunk. In that event, Spritz would never imagine he was there to help the girl. It would be difficult for Spritz to imagine that anyway.

And he knew Spritz's peculiar disposition well enough to know that he would treat his presence in the cabin as a joke. Yes, if he acted drunk, he would be safe. But Spritz would throw him out of the main cabin, give him more whisky, and—the girl would be lost. Then he heard heavy footsteps coming down the companionway.

Annesty slipped out of the chart-room and crouched by the side of the companionway steps. Unless he could stun Spritz with one blow it would be all over. For it was doubtful if even John L. Sullivan, then in his prime, would have any chance in a rough-and-tumble with the big captain, much less Jim Annesty, who felt like a man about to be hanged, the courage that had once made him a great athlete having been drowned in years of alcohol.

It was Spritz coming down the stairs, and he was alone. Annesty was not hidden and if the captain looked his way he would see him. But Spritz's eyes and mind were fixed on something else and he

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never even glanced in Annesty's direction. As he reached the deck of the main cabin, the beach-comber raised himself on his tiptoes and lifted the belaying-pin.

Then, with all his strength, he brought it down on the captain's head and the big man fell unconscious without as much as a grunt.

That blow would have killed an ordinary man, but Annesty had no delusions about Spritz's vitality. Very quickly he went through his pockets and found the key of the girl's cabin; then he went back into the chart-room and picked up a hank of spun yarn he had seen lying there. Coming back, he securely bound Spritz's hands behind his back and tied his ankles together. Then he opened the door of the cabin where the girl was confined.

The bunk ran fore and aft against the vessel's side. Into this Spritz had thrown the girl, but she had got out and was crouched on the leather settee, which was fixed athwartships at the after end of the cabin. Her hair fell in a shower to her waist, her clothes were torn, she was white with terror and she was still crying.

But she did not recognize Annesty. Indeed, the clean shave and change of clothes and the general air of resolution altered him completely from the disreputable beach-comber she had tried to reform. So she gasped when he entered the room, and her astonishment stopped her crying.

"I'm Annesty," he anticipated her question.

She was too much upset to do more than nod, and she probably saw no help in Annesty's presence. She would have faced death bravely enough, but that other... And Spritz had carefully removed every sort of weapon from the room.

"Help me to drag Spritz in here."

She only looked at him helplessly, so Annesty took her arm almost roughly and led her to where the unconscious Spritz sprawled.

"Take his other arm. And, look here—you've got to buck up. Be brave. I think I can get you out of this all right, but if I can not I'll see you get a chance to kill yourself. Here, wait a minute."

He went into the chart-room again and brought out a small glass of whisky.

"Here, drink this."

She refused, shook her head, seemed disgusted. But he insisted, told her to take it like medicine, and at last she swallowed it with a wry face.

"Now, you'll be better. Take his arm again and we'll lock him up where you were."

The whisky did its work. A flush came to the girl's cheek. With some difficulty they dragged Spritz into the cabin, left him on the floor and locked the door.

"You look better." Annesty put the key in his pocket.

"I feel better. I'm afraid I've been an awful coward."

"Not at all—you had a rotten shock."

"Can I help you?"

"Certainly. But I don't quite know what I'm going to do yet. Will you step into the chart-room—no, somebody might go there. Go into that spare room there and lock the door on the inside. I'll find you a pistol soon. Wonder why we took the trouble to put Spritz in his own room?"

The girl did not know, but she went into the spare room and locked the door. Then Annesty considered the worst of his job. His destination? He shivered, then tried to put it out of his mind as being too far off to bother with. Sydney Dick at present in charge of the deck and the only other white man on board? In some way he would have to be confined with Spritz. After that Annesty would have to force the native crew to do his bidding.

It looked like an impossible task for any man—for Spritz had his men bound to him by all sorts of fears. Well, then, the first thing to do was to get control of all the firearms on the schooner. Annesty went back into the chart-room, for he had found no gun on the unconscious Spritz, who seldom needed one.

OVER the bunk in the chart-room were two fine rifles and in the desk a pair of new revolvers with several packages of cartridges. Annesty took down the rifles and hid them under the mattress; then he turned to look for the key of the room and found a double-holstered belt for the revolvers behind the door. Attached to the belt were two canvas bags for shells. This was luck. The revolvers were not loaded, so Annesty loaded them and fastened the belt 'round his waist.

Against the forward bulkhead of the main cabin were two stands of various

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rifles and shotguns. These Annesty also locked in the chart-room after knocking out pins and otherwise doing his best to render the guns useless. He then went forward to Sydney Dick's room in the alleyway. The lamp was lit, but expecting the owner to interrupt him every moment he searched it thoroughly; finding nothing but a small derringer which he thought of throwing overboard. Then he remembered his promise to the girl. The pistol was loaded, but there were no spare shells. He went back to the spare room and knocked.

"Yes?"

"Open the door—I have something for you."

She came out quickly, looking much better, and took the pistol gratefully.

"Keep quiet till I need you. At daylight I'll run my bluff on the crew. If I can get the Kanaka second mate on my side we'll win out. Don't use that thing until the last, and keep it hidden."

She promised, and then annoyed at his carelessness he went into Spritz's cabin and with a handkerchief securely gagged the captain, who was breathing rather heavily but seemed none the worse for the blow on the head. For a little while Annesty watched him. He felt he had been very lucky. Then he realized that Spritz had given orders that nobody was to enter the main cabin. The steward would have to be reckoned with. He was a Chinaman and would have a knife but no gun. It was unlikely that Spritz would allow any member of the crew to own a gun—except Sydney Dick. Therefore Annesty had probably accounted for all the firearms on the schooner. But he felt very tired and sleepy and his nerves were on edge and getting worse. He went out and locked the door, and then eight bells were struck.

The time, then, had come to tackle Sydney Dick. He would be going to his room, relieved by the second mate. Annesty went back to the chart-room and took a small drink. He put down the glass, went out quickly and picked up the belaying-pin. It had occurred to him that the mate might come to the chart-room to write up the log—a fear born of Annesty's ignorance, since the mate of a ship keeps his own log in his own cabin. So he waited again by the steps of the companionway.

The passage was proceeding just as other passages. The kidnaping of the girl had made no more disturbance in the ship's routine than the loading of an extra package. Everything was quiet, the schooner slipping along about six knots an hour. No one ever went into the main cabin at night but Spritz, unless it was necessary to call him on account of bad weather. Overhead on the poop Annesty heard footsteps—the man relieving the wheel and the second mate relieving Sydney Dick. There were no passengers.

Annesty waited twenty minutes by the cabin clock, then he tiptoed along the alleyway and listened outside the curtain of the mate's room. Regular breathing told him all he wanted to know. He did not relish the idea of hitting a sleeping man, blackguard as that man was, but it had to be done. He pushed aside the curtain and went in, the belaying-pin poised. He stood by the side of the bunk, hesitating. Then he closed his eyes and brought the weapon down—wildly. It missed the mate altogether, hitting the edge of the bunk. Sydney Dick sat up and saw him in the half-light but the intended shout never left his lips.

There came to Annesty, nerving him, the memory of the girl's struggle with Spritz as he carried her into the boat. But he did not hit the mate as hard as he had hit the captain.

Then another problem—and problems were falling all about him like flakes in a heavy snow-storm with a dark bank ahead presaging a heavier fall—what to do with the unconscious mate? To leave him in his room would be folly, for he couldn't watch him, and some one would be sure to find him; and to put him in with Spritz would be as unwise, for several reasons. Jim again knocked on the girl's door.

"Sorry to trouble you again, but I have another prisoner. May I have your room to lock him in?"

She assented and they dragged the mate to the spare room and tied him with spun yarn. Then they locked him up and Annesty suggested the chart-room, with its array of useless guns, for her resting-place. She made no objection, and the man noticed how the events of the night had taken away her initiative, how she depended entirely upon him and trusted him; and he found something very pleasing and strengthening in her trust.

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Nevertheless he successfully removed the whisky from the chart-room without her seeing him do it and hid it in a convenient place. Then he remembered that he had not gagged the mate and went back to do it. He told himself he would have to stop forgetting things like that.

It was a little after five o'clock. Time enough when light came—about six—to tell the second mate he was in charge and impress the crew with the need of obeying him. But how would they take it? He wanted to take the schooner to Sydney, but that was many hundred miles away. He would have to sleep. Was the girl able to watch against surprize while he slept? A lot would depend on the second mate. If he were trustworthy and would come on his side half the battle would be over.

But it was a lot to expect. It was the hour when a man's courage is at its lowest and Jim Annesty saw no comfort ahead. And while he waited, speculating unhappily, the dawn came.

He heard the steward go forward to the galley. Was Spritz in the habit of having coffee at this hour? But that didn't matter, unless the steward had another key. He examined the revolvers and went up the companionway. The second mate was standing aft by the wheel. Annesty beckoned to him, and walked to the break of the poop.

"A passenger?" The second mate was surprized.

"No." Annesty drew one of the revolvers. "I'm in charge of the ship."

The second mate's mouth opened stupidly and Annesty went on, telling of the crime Spritz had committed, that death was the penalty and that all who assisted the captain would be made accomplices.

"Now," he finished, "I have destroyed all the guns but these—unless you have one?"

The second mate shook his head—he had no gun.

"Well, then, do as I tell you and make the crew obey and you'll be all right. If you don't, I'll shoot."

"You can't boss all hands—" the second mate's voice was ugly—"and I won't go against Spritz. So you can't get the schooner to Sydney or anywhere. I'm going to keep out of it by going to my room."

And he went off the poop.

Things looked very black. Annesty did not want to shoot any one. He had to have a crew to work the ship. If they all imitated the second mate—as they likely would—he was helpless and it would be only a question of time before some one released Spritz. When that happened, to shoot the girl and himself would be the only thing to do. And then he saw the girl at the head of the companionway.

"It's nearly day, isn't it?" she asked.

"Yes. This twilight will disappear very soon, with the sun coming up. But I ought to tell you that things look bad, very bad."

She smiled.

"I feel sure that everything is going to come out all right. You see, I have just been praying and I feel that God is going to answer my prayer."

"I don't see how, unless He makes the crew go to work."

SHE did not answer, but her smile was one of complete faith. Then suddenly the dawn vanished with the sunrise, a school of flying-fish flushed past, harried by *bonita*, the breeze dropped to a light air, and it was day. With an excited cry the girl clutched Annesty's arm.

"See! Didn't I tell you?"

He followed the direction of her pointing finger and saw a ship. Then he made a dive for the companionway and brought up the glasses, focusing them with trembling fingers.

The ship was about a mile and a half away and Annesty didn't need the glass to tell him she was an English man-of-war.

"Quick—" he laid down the glasses—"help me hoist the ensign, union down. What luck, what wonderful luck! It's a man-of-war. We're all right."

"It's not luck," she insisted. "I told you God would answer my prayer."

The man-of-war ran up the answering pennant, but Annesty did not feel that he had been sufficiently definite—and well for him he didn't. Therefore, with much difficulty, he searched the "Commercial Code" until he found the flag-hoist for "Mutiny, send armed boat," and he sent the four flags up in place of the inverted ensign. But the schooner had barely steerageway and in the light air the flags hung indistinguishably; but after Annesty had ordered the man at the wheel to alter

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his course so that the flags would get all the breeze favorably—and rather to his surprize the man obeyed—they one by one spread long enough for the officer on the man-of-war to read them. Dimly over the water came the boatswain's pipe and at that moment Annesty heard a noise in the main cabin below.

He opened the skylight quickly and saw the second mate, who had promised to remain neutral, trying to open Spritz's door with a chisel and hammer. The sight made him furious—the second mate's action seemed to be directed against the girl—and he pulled one of the revolvers out of its holster and, without caring, began to shoot at the second mate. That individual responded with a howl in spite of Annesty's bad shooting and dived for safety.

But the ex-beach-comber wanted to kill. The long night vigil had reacted upon his frazzled nerves with almost a blood-lust, and the second mate's treachery had supplied the incentive. He started down the companionway determined to kill, while the crew came out on deck to see what was the matter—for it must be remembered that this was their first intimation of any change, although the second mate had waylaid the steward when he brought the coffee, which was something Annesty had overlooked. But the girl stopped him.

"Don't bother with him," she pleaded.

"But you don't understand what he was doing."

"Yes, I do. But we ought to be so grateful to God for sending the man-of-war that we would want to forgive our enemies."

Annesty sighed. The literalness of this Salvation Army girl was a bit too much for him, although he was an orthodox Christian. Her religion was such a personal and intimate affair that she would not have been greatly surprized if her conception of God had suddenly appeared on the poop of the *Lady Ellen*. The realness of her faith was staggering.

"Oh, all right—if you don't want him shot." He placed the revolver in the holster.

"That's a good man—and the boat will be here in a minute."

But when the boat did arrive Annesty found himself confronted with a situation he had never expected. In the first place, the officer in charge had expected a mutinous crew. When that crew threw him a rope and then put a side-ladder over he began to think some one was playing tricks with him. And there was no sign of trouble.

True, the girl and Annesty quickly told their story, but the wily second mate, looking for future favors from Spritz, swore that the girl and Annesty had come on board together, pretending to be man and wife; that in the night they had brutally stunned the captain and the mate, smashed all the guns, and then threatened to shoot him—the second mate—if he didn't take the ship where they wanted.

He had refused because he was honest and no pirate, but only a few minutes before, as the crew would testify, the man Annesty had amused himself by shooting at him. No, sir, there had been no mutiny as any one could see. 'Twas just a sheer case of piracy.

"But why did I hoist the flags, if that is the case?" suggested Annesty.

This puzzled the officer, who decided to put the matter before his captain—taking the girl, Annesty, Spritz and Sydney Dick on board the man-of-war with him.

So the now conscious and blasphemous captain and mate were untied and helped into the boat. Their scowls and muttered threats were disconcerting to Annesty, whose nerves were nearly gone, but the girl treated them with contempt; and in such wise they gathered before the captain of the man-of-war.

The girl told her tale first—who she was, why she went to the island, and about Spritz's attempt to kidnap her. Then Annesty told of his seeing this, and of what he had done to protect the girl. Spritz and Sydney Dick denied it all and insisted that Annesty was a pirate. The naval captain was obviously undecided—both tales were unusual—when another officer entered the cabin. This one looked at Jim for some moments, then whispered in his captain's ear.

"So you rowed in the Oxford boat?" asked the captain.

Annesty admitted it, and then the other officer revealed himself as an old friend. This was all very bad for Spritz, for the captain of the man-of-war, discovering that Annesty was one of his own kind, understood his mental processes and felt he was telling the truth; when the girl explained

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that she had no clothes on the schooner, proving she had not gone on board freely—for what woman would go for a voyage without taking any clothes?—the case went against Spritz.

"We're bound for Sydney," said the captain. "I think we'll take you along and get you sent to jail."

At this Sydney Dick weakened, swearing he had only obeyed his captain, who had gone ashore to steal the girl.

"Take them for'ard and put 'em in cells—the schooner we'll take charge of," ordered the captain.

Then the girl began to plead for leniency. It was a matter of religious conviction. Enemies must be forgiven. The captain of the man-of-war attempted to show her the fallacy of such a creed by illustrating what would happen to the navy if it followed it. But the girl would not reason.

Like many others, she believed a thing was right, and when her common sense showed it was wrong she deliberately denied common sense. And after all she was the person most interested. The captain knew it would be an awful bore attending Spritz's trial in Sydney. So he gave in, and gave an order. The order resulted in two splashes and much cursing, and the crew of the man-of-war crowded the rail to watch Spritz and his mate swim ungracefully back to the schooner.

ANNESTY in some of his old friend's clothes looked very different from the beach-comber the girl had tried to convert, and she no longer talked conversion to him. Instead, she was shy, and her eyes met his with difficulty, and she blushed easily. So that Annesty's old friend told him he was a lucky dog, for the girl was wonderfully pretty, the more so now that love thrilled her.

But Annesty doubted his luck, and he thought long and deeply on the subject. She loved him, but better a little pain now than the pain of a lifetime. He meant to avoid drink, but he knew how often he had made that same resolution and failed. He did not know that he was cured—that he had been cured by one of those uncommon psychological shocks akin to hypnotism or prayerful suggestion and that when the poison died out of him he would be entirely well. And so, seeing his duty as he saw it, he was not happy on the way to Sydney.

THE sun was setting behind the fast disappearing coast-line of Australia, and Annesty leaned over the rail of the Liverpool-bound ship watching it. That coast-line held all in the world that loved him, all that he loved. Somewhere on that land was the only woman he had ever loved, the one woman who ever loved him. He knew this, although he had not spoken of his love to her. There had been no need for either to do that. And yet, perversely, he had tried to believe that if he went away without a word of farewell she would think he did not love her.

He had changed greatly from the nerveless wreck that had so bravely gone to the girl's rescue on the schooner and three or four months more on the ship without whisky would see a yet better man. He was working his way to England, to begin life there where he had left it.

There was a tang in the wind that seemed to hint at great deeds—deeds untold, unsung, never shouted about from the housetops; and Annesty, looking far into the future, saw many people, his descendants, all tainted with that alcoholic tendency which would remain in him even if he were cured.

He pictured them, helpless to resist the craving for the poison, in the gutter, in jail, in the lowest places of the world, and all of them suffering: young men suddenly stricken as he had been in their athletic prime; young women falling victims to the disease in their budding womanhood; and the degenerate age of all of them, palsied, useless, filthy, criminal.

He had shuddered at the picture and clenched his fist with the resolve that no such unhappy line should descend from him. No, he loved the little girl and she loved him, but he felt that he was showing a greater love by leaving her forever.

Then the dark fell, the side-lights were lit, the lookout went on the forecastle head and presently eight bells were struck aft and the lookout repeated it.

"All's well," was borne aft by the wind, and the ex-beach-comber, looking reverently upward, swore to keep it so.

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The CAMP-FIRE
A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

FOLLOWING our Camp-Fire custom, Terry Ramsaye rises and introduces himself on the occasion of his first story in our magazine:

My story, "A Handmade Hero," comes out of a fact experience very close to the fiction version in the course of my newspaper career in the West. Our hero, whom I have called *Denis Kearney*, really made good and is now a chief of police out West.

My experiences and adventures have been those typical of an active career in newspaper and motion-picture life—including a stowaway trip to Liverpool, a dip in the early Mexican trouble, the first aeroplane trip across the continent with the late Cal Rodgers, two months with a yegg gang in behalf of a bank syndicate, some larking about in the Northwest and sundry disaster assignments.

My adventures these days consist mostly of what can happen over a flat-top desk in a motion-picture promotion office—"same of which is considerable" as Will Ritchey might remark.—TERRY RAMSAYE.

SO FAR as I can remember off-hand, the following is the first letter to our Camp-Fire from Papua, and even it was prompted by something Mr. Armit read in "Ask Adventure" concerning New Guinea oil-fields. But then, in a way, "Ask Adventure" and all our other departments belong to Camp-Fire—old timers will remember that the older ones were for a long time run merely as part of our general "Camp-Fire," and of course all of them are primarily for the benefit of those who gather round our blaze.

Incidentally, I have no way of knowing how many of those who read our magazine are members of our Camp-Fire, since any one belongs if he wishes to and there are no ceremonies to be gone through with, but, judging from letters and some direct knowledge, they must include considerably over ninety per cent. of our readers.

If letters from Papua have been scarce, Mr. Armit states in a postscript that our magazine is "very popular" there, so probably we have quite a few comrades in that distant land, though only one has written. His letter is dated August 21, and reached

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me late in November. Even allowing for war disturbance, that is a long trip.

Port Moresby, Papua.

You may be interested by a few details of this rather unknown corner of the globe.

NEW GUINEA is the largest island in the world—some 360,000 square miles—of which Holland owns the western half, Australia the southern and eastern side (90,000 square miles), and the remainder is the former colony of German New Guinea, which includes the New Britain Archipelago, Nauru, Admiralty Group, and the Marshalls and Carolines. Japan seized the two latter clusters of islands; but Australia sent a naval and military force under the late Brigadier-General William Holmes and captured the former possessions in early September, 1914. Australia administers the captured territory for the Allies, and has a garrison located there as her Occupation Force; the final fate of the colony is in abeyance until the end of the war.

THE southern and eastern side of New Guinea, with the D'Entrecasteaux Group, the Louisiade Archipelago and many other islands and atolls, form the Australian colony known as Papua.

Dutch New Guinea is not very developed, and the interior, with the exception of the Charles Louis Range (a mighty chain of peaks, snow-clad and crowned by enormous glaciers) and a narrow belt along the great rivers, is still unexplored.

Papua, the first oversea territory of the Commonwealth of Australia, has made a great advance in settlement and development since it was taken over by the mother continent. The planting industry has made great strides, and the export of agricultural produce is rapidly becoming of large extent.

The total exports for the year ended June 30, 1917, were valued at over $782,000—copra, rubber, sisal hemp, gold, pearls, sandalwood, bêch-de-mer, copper ore, pearl shell, trochas shell, turtle shell, and miscellaneous products. The principal export trade is with Australia.

THE oil-fields are situated in the Vailala River country, some two hundred miles west of the capital and seat of government, Port Moresby.

The field is still in the development stage, and the Australian Government has a monopoly of the oil business; private enterprise has not, so far, been allowed on the field.

Upoia, on the Vailala River, is the scene of the enterprise, and about twelve or fourteen men comprise the staff, with Papuan laborers for the manual work.

The Department of Home and Territories, Melbourne, Australia, controls the enterprise, and has a Director of Oil-Fields resident at Upoia.

PAPUA is within the tropics—between the fifth and twelfth parallels South latitude—and extends from 141 to 155 East Longitude. The climate is trying to those unaccustomed to extremes of heat and moisture. Malaria is common, but with proper care, and quinin in prophylactic doses, it is not very dangerous. Temperance, a mosquito-net, gentle exercise, a good and varied diet of all the fresh food you can obtain (canned "dog" and other horrors is the staple menu in the territory) and a cheerful disposition are important factors in the maintenance of robust health in malarial countries.

THE mean temperature at Port Moresby is about 81.4 degrees, maximum temperature 87.5 degrees, humidity 70.5 per cent.; at Upoia (Vailala) 82.4 and 90.9 degrees, and humidity 80 per cent.; rainfall at Port Moresby 38.48 inches and at Vailala 121.40 inches.

From April to September is the best season—the period of cool southeast winds from the seas; the rest of the year is wet, and mosquitoes work overtime.

THE New Guineas are a paradise for the student of natural history. Every schoolboy is familiar with the birds of paradise, of which there are about fifty-six varieties known to science; and the history of the mysterious island is rich in stories of adventure—real-life tales of strange and weird peoples, cannibals, head-hunters and primitive folk still in the stone age.—L. P. B. ARMIT.

WITH his first story in our magazine, Ben F. Baker follows Camp-Fire custom and stands up and introduces himself:

San Francisco.

Along about the middle of the Klondike rush (the Summer of '98) I met up with the managing director of the outfit that was paying me a salary for running one of their trading stations. Here is how he introduced himself: "My name is ——— ———. My time is worth a dollar a minute. Be brief."

The gentleman has since passed out, but I still have my first estimate of him—a chump misplaced.

NOW, from 1876 to 1918 is a long time; so, in order to be brief, let's skip the first eighteen years wherein nothing much happened except a lot of kid fun, residence in Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, Colorado and Montana, getting the knack of riding pretty well, shooting even better and finishing high-school.

And now see what comes of reading magazines. I have forgotten the publication—even the writer—but an article on Alaska started me North in July, 1894, from the little smelter town of Anaconda, Montana, at eighteen. The article dealt mostly with the Alaskan southeast coast and the writer declared that Sitka, with a population of seventeen hundred, boasted eleven hundred Indians! Me for Sitka!

BUT the fool boat went straight to Juneau, which, even then, was a regular, civilized community; so a sadly disappointed but not discouraged kid eagerly put in with a party of eight Cheechakos, Yukon bound. And right here I would like to try to tell you of the Yukon Valley of that period, its men, their customs and the conditions under which they lived, all of which were changed in a single season when the Klondike was discovered.

For of all the many gifts Alaska made me—many of them she took back again—the one without price was the privilege of seeing a little of the great interior of the pre-Klondike days and of knowing the real pioneers who blazed the trail for the hordes who followed them. Sure, I know, the Klondiker was a real pioneer; but—no, I won't do it. I don't belong to the "I Was There First" club.

JUST the same, my party had to have an Indian guide over the Chilkoot, in September, mind you! Three years later that trail was as easy to follow as a county road. No Skagway for us. No

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mushers by the thousand camped from Linderman to Labarge to furnish shelter or even food, in a pinch. We met white men just once on the whole trip from Dyea to Fort Selkirk; two out-going miners with whom we camped for a night at Rink Rapids. And we ran the Cañon and Whitehorse and Five Fingers with loaded boats, in extreme low water. Lucky? Nix. Looney.

Besides, we were bound for the Land of Gold, and misfortune was not for us—yet.

We drifted for days with mush-ice freezing to the boats so fast that one man did nothing else but knock it off so that we might keep afloat. And clothes! Summer togs from head to foot, all of us. Oh, we were a wise bunch!

WE WERE finally frozen in at Selkirk, landing there with a few pounds of beans and maybe half a pound of tea. There the party split up, some of us Wintering at that post and the others going on to Forty-Mile over the first ice.

And there, from Arthur Harper, the post trader and later one of the founders of Dawson, I learned the rudiments of fur buying and trading, which knowledge was to land me, four years later, in the soft berth of local agent (manager) for one of the two, big pioneer companies that controlled the Yukon Valley.

In the meantime, I cut cordwood, "cut up" as mate on the old *P. B. Weare*, mined two Summers at Circle City (Birch Creek) and drove a freight dog-team there most of one Winter. Then Dawson, '97 and '98, and a pretty fair stake which was promptly lost. Then on to Rampart for four years as "Company man."

AND then, until 1910, mining, working for the Company, trading on my own hook, contracting with the infantry post at Fort Gibbon for cordwood, having a hand in the attempt to make the ill-fated Chena the head of navigation on the Tanana, etc., etc., etc. some more, with one trip to the Outside in 1907.

Made dog-team or canoe trips to Salmon River, Forty-Mile, Birch Creek, Ray River, Dahl River, Koyukuk, Nenana and many other tributaries of the Tanana, Novikakat, Tozikatat, etc. Rode my moccasins to every stampede I got wind of. Made a little stake on Sullivan Creek, Hot Springs District, in 1910 and left for the States same year. Have not been North since.

AFTER 1910, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, Mexico as far down as Tepic, on the west coast and as far inland as Torreon on the east side. Mostly in the show business and mostly broke. Of course. But fun? Well, I should say so! Been getting better than an even break, right along, except for one thing. Haven't been able to break into the Army. Enlisting officers tell me my eyes are not good. Correct. Snow-blind too often. And now the show is over, over there.

BUT believe me, I can still hear mighty good—good enough to hear Siberia calling. And I expect to be there in time to see the geese come North. Maybe you'll hear from me. Anyway, I hope to have the chance to tell you a few of the Indian folk-lore tales as I heard them from Selkirk to Anvik. And if I succeed in telling them as they were told to me, you'll find them interesting.

Also, I have a hunch some of you will recognize them as blood brothers to the legends of the Siberian native; for the Yukon Indian and the Husky are Mongols as sure as the Sioux is an Indian.

SINCE "Mis-Deal" has been selected to bust into print, I would like to add a little note.

The tale is founded on a trip of four of the "real pioneers" referred to a while back. They made the trip from Tramway Bar to Rampart with an involuntary side trip to the main Koyukuk, as stated. They did eat a dog and they numbered among them the original of *Michael Joseph Ryan*. He is still north of 53, chasing the yellow rainbow. Good luck to him and to you—all of you.—BEN F. BAKER.

CONCERNING his story in this issue, one of his "Flotsam" tales, S. B. H. Hurst writes me:

Seattle, Wash.

By the way, *Tom Spritz* is real. I knew him very well. He was a wonderful rough-and-tumble fighter, but with the gloves he was a joke. Of course he was older than I was. The last I heard of him was that he was chased out of Polynesia, and . . . He was actually married to three women, and made no bones about it. He and the bos'n of the —— fought for over an hour on the sea wall in 'Frisco. It was shortly after Corbett licked Sullivan, and the row started about that fight. The papers wrote it up in great style, saying —— got them to kiss and make up. As a matter of fact, he was hiding in his room, very full—the same man I told you about leaving me on Pitcairn.—S. B. H. HURST.

LITTLE has been said lately about the American League for Citizenship, Inc. As stated in the beginning, it will move slowly. And bad health has prevented my keeping up even to the slow schedule planned. But it keeps moving.

When it has developed sufficiently to make its real start more will be heard about it. Meanwhile those who have joined are asked to be both patient and confident, and it is hoped that those who have formed or are forming tens will push their work. These local organizations are the key-stones of the whole, whose work is centered in them. Particularly in towns and smaller cities even a single ten of the right caliber can make itself a factor that will be tremendously felt.

Not a penny of the money sent in as dues or contributions has been spent, nor will be until the course ahead is more definitely marked out.

If ever a country needed the teaching and furtherance of real and practical democracy and of definite, practical and understanding individual citizenship, this country needs it now. That is what the League is for, and, when the right time

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comes, I hope every good American among you is going to turn to and do his part instead of letting things drift as in the past.

W. C. TUTTLE'S own pictures of the characters in his stories, reproduced at previous Camp-Fires, have caused so many of you to write their appreciation that I thought you might like a close-up of *Magpie Simpkins* by Mr. Tuttle.

"Tut" is no longer a cartoonist by profession but he can't quite free himself of the pleasant habit. The envelopes of his letters to this office are sometimes decorated with humorous, rollicking little sketches that must have brought happy grins to mail clerks as well as to the staff.

CAN you find this man another war? He is a Camp-Fire comrade and he's asking for help. Also, both he and his pal were invalided home from the French front, so they are not hunting for something they don't know about. The letter was written from a U. S. General Hospital in this country. I do not give the writer's name or identify him in any way, for his letter was written to me personally and not meant for publication, but I know he'll not mind its appearing in impersonal form.

I fell down on this job of finding him another war, though I suggested that Siberia, Russia and maybe Germany herself might be able to furnish something. And almost the next day the papers reported Peru, Chile and Bolivia on the verge of hostilities. Maybe they will do the trick for him, though they seem at this writing to have quieted down, but who, if his own country no longer needed him, would want better fighting comrades than the Czecho-Slovaks? But if they too have ceased fighting by the time these two pals have got their discharges, who will find them another war?

Theirs is the unquenchable thirst for adventure and I wish them well—and the many others like them; but I can't help hoping that they will find satisfying adventure of some other kind. The world has had so much of war. But you never can tell.

I don't know whether I let you know it or not, but since you have last heard from me, I believe, I've transferred to the Quartermaster Detachment at this Post. In that interval, also, it has begun to look as though peace is here, despite the fact that myself and a good many others are not in favor of such an early one. However, it's our duty to fight like —— and let the executive heads do as they please officially.

WELL, my reason for writing you is this: My pal here, who has been with me since I landed in this country from France, seems to be of about the same mind as am I in regard to certain things. He was gassed when serving with the French artillery. Realizing that this war is about through, we are desirous of finding another one. We are informed that as returned soldiers we will be among the first discharged.

Now, to get down to business. I know your "Ask Adventure" Department very well, but I don't believe that it exactly covers what I'm after. To be brief, he (my pal) and I are looking for another war or disturbance of some kind where, after we are discharged, we may find recreation and enlist or get commissions as ambulance drivers, cavalrymen, dispatch riders, artillerymen, or anything else. In our brief careers in this service we have had so many different jobs and served in so many different ways that we're almost fit for anything. Can you put me on the track of another war? Or, if you can't, can you put me on the track of some one who can, and if possible, give me a little dope on it?—A. A. A.

AS SOME of us already know, William Hope Hodgson, a lieutenant in the British forces, whose story appears in this issue, is among those who perished in the

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war. April 17, 1918, having volunteered for hazardous duty, he and his two companions were killed by a shell. He has sat at our Camp-Fire and his story, appearing nearly a year after his death, makes his memory very vivid. Our greeting and salute.

IN OUR "Ask Adventure" department one of you stirred up the interesting question of the Jivero Indians and their little habit of drying and shrinking human heads as souvenirs. Here are two letters bearing on the subject:

Washington, D. C.

In the National Museum there are three specimens placarded thus:

"Dried Human Heads—The Jibaros and other tribes of Indians, living on the branches of the River Amazon, in the cordilleras, removed the skull from the head of a slain enemy in the following manner:

"A cut is made around the lower part of the neck and the skin turned up from the head, care being taken to preserve intact the nose, mouth and other prominent features. The skin is then turned right side out, the mouth sewed up with coarse cord, which is left hanging in a fringe below the skin, and the cavity filled with coarse white sand or gravel . . . until the head has shriveled to one-third its usual size, preserving the features. It is then suspended in the cabin, and upon special occasions maledictions are heaped upon the victim of the tribe."

This may be of some interest. The specimens are good, remarkably impish in their expressions as though malice had been the motive of those molding the features.—P. A. STRACHAN.

Havana, Cuba.

The Jiveros are of Ecuador and not of Peru. There are a number of tribes whose habitat is in the region of the Marañon River and it is all these tribes together that are generally meant when the generic term Jiveros is used, yet actually all these tribes are distinct and have distinctive names.

THE flow of trade goods to the Indians of southern Ecuador is mostly out of the city of Loja and down the Zamora River. The tribe of Jiveros proper is that nearest to this center of trade influence, so that the exchange of cotton goods, firearms and trinkets, for rubber, gold, etc., is with the Jivero tribe. That part of the produce that comes from other tribes is either captured in war by the Jiveros or acquired by barter in times of tribal peace, and in consequence all the tribes are referred to as Jiveros as that is the only tribal name known to the traders of the region.

In the same way the name "Chunchos" is used for all the tribes occupying the lower affluents of the Madre de Dios in southern Peru, and there is still another generic name for the tribes of central Peru pertinent to the Huallaga and Ucayali rivers.

THE Jiveros proper occupy the territory immediately to the east of both the Paute and Zamora rivers, but they do not go, except in tribal wars when invading enemy territory, south of the junction of these two rivers, the Paute and Zamora unite to form the Sanitago, which flows into the Marañon. South of the Jivero tribe, east of the Santiago River and north of the Marañon the territory is occupied by a tribe known as the Huambizes (Wam-beé-zes) and they range along the north bank of the Marañon from the Santiago to the Morona.

It should be noted that the Marañon River after flowing for nearly a thousand miles in a general north and south direction changes this direction, after receiving the waters of the Santiago, to one almost due east and west, making a right angle, and the waters of the combined rivers break through the last low chain of outriders to the Andes Mountains on the Atlantic side, through a box cañon with walls from a thousand to two thousand feet high, and this cañon is called the Pongo Manseriche and is a bar to any navigation of the upper river.

The east and south banks of the Marañon are held by a large and very intelligent tribe known as the Aguarunas (Ag-wa-rú-nas) and the west bank by a sub tribe of the Aguarunas known as the Antipas (An-teé-pas). These four tribes together are those usually referred to generically as the Jiveros.

THE Huambizes are constantly at war with both the Jiveros on the north and the Aguarunas and Antipas on the south, and also frequently with the Moronas to the east. Except the Huambizes, all these tribes maintain at times trading relations with the whites, being desirous of obtaining thin cotton underwear as some protection from the insects and mosquitoes and which they wear only at night, rifles, shotguns, steel spear-points, needles, thread, matches, knives, machetes, etc., and will give in exchange quantities of rubber and gold, the amount depending on the keenness of their desire for some particular thing. The Huambizes, however, are utterly savage, intensely ferocious, hostile to white men and absolutely unapproachable by them. The only way to find out anything about their country would be by an armed expedition in overwhelming force.

IT IS this tribe who are the head hunters and not the Jiveros, who have had to take the odium of the sins of their neighbors. That reduced heads come out through the Jivero tribe can not be doubted, but so also do they through all the other tribes that surround them. The heads are either captured by the other tribes in raids on the Huambizes' villages or acquired through barter during periods of tribal peace. The surrounding tribes try to get the heads as they are good material for trade with the Caucheros, who will generally give some much coveted article for a good head.

The Government of Peru has passed very stringent laws to stop the traffic, regarding it as putting a premium on murder of traders and explorers, but nevertheless any one desirous of getting such a head can obtain one in Iquitos for from fifty to one hundred dollars each, depending on the available supply.

NO ACCURATE information can be obtained from the surrounding tribes as to how the heads are shrunk. It is evident, however, that the ashes of some wood very strong in lye are used to dissolve the fatty and gelatinous matters from the bones. The brains could be easily washed out through the spinal-cord opening after rotting a few days, and it may be that the skull is kept filled with such a solution for months. The bones could then be broken up and pulled out in pieces.

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Rumor in the locality states that the moisture is driven from the muscles of the face and skin by filling the skull cap, either before or after boning, with small hot pebbles, possibly also by burying the head in hot sand. It is also said that the curing and shrinking is done by slow continuous smoking in the acrid smoke of certain species of palm-nuts, similar to those burned to coagulate the *leche* of the *Hevea* or rubber tree. The smoke of some of these nuts is heavy with both acetic acid and gum resins so that it is conceivable that a slow smoking in such an acrid and gummy menstruum might accomplish the desired result.

THE Huambizes seem to have an especial aversion to white men. There are reputed to be extensive gold deposits up the Santiago River, and many prospectors, disregarding the reports about these Indians, have gone up there to see. But to date no one of them has ever come out alive, and it is equally certain that some European heads have come out to market from this tribe. The writer has seen two, one unmistakably Irish, the other appearing to be German. The Huambizes have declared it to be a closed region to white men.

THE use of firearms is understood by these tribes, but as a rule they do not use them in their tribal wars. Ammunition is too scarce and difficult to obtain to waste it in this way. It is reserved for the killing of big game such as tapirs and howling monkeys, for while the poisoned arrows are very effective with birds and small animals they are not so with large ones. From a hundred to two hundred darts are required to paralyze a tapir sufficiently for them to capture and kill it. And a howling monkey will not stay still long enough to get filled full of arrows; one prick is enough and he is off. The poison appears to act as a paralyzant; stopping the heart almost instantly with birds and very small animals but causing only some motor paralysis in the larger animals. I imagine that it would take a great many darts to kill a man. At any rate they do not use them in fighting with each other, using instead bows and arrows, spears and clubs.

ALL these tribes at times make war on the whites and even in very recent years have penetrated for a considerable distance into civilized regions, killing some hundreds of people. Punitive expeditions by soldiers usually accomplish but little in the way of punishment, for the Indians scatter all through the forest and no one but themselves can follow their routes through the tangled masses, as most of their paths through the bush are mere traces.

The rifles they possess are an early type of Winchester, model of somewhere about 1865. In the Aguaruna language a rifle is called a "Wunchustre." The derivation of the name is obvious. So also their name for a shotgun (most of those they possess are of the muzzle-loading Belgian "gas-pipe" order) which they call an "Escupe," from the Spanish *escopeta*, a shotgun.

MR. YOUNG, speaking of the darts used in the blow-guns, states that they are about the size of a lead pencil. This is true in so far as width and length is concerned; their thickness, however, is no more than a sixteenth of an inch. They are made of bamboo and have a very long sharp point. Before being shot the dart is almost completely sawed through about half an inch from the point. The teeth in the lower jaw of a young mnokey being used for a saw. A twist of raw wild cotton is wrapped around the end of the dart to close the bore of the gun and give the blown breath an effective resistance for propulsion. The idea of sawing the point nearly through is that the long shaft of the dart will break off when it strikes, leaving the point with the poison on it sticking into the skin with a length so short that the bird or animal will effectively rub it in further, in any effort to rub it out.

IN PREPARING the poison it is Aguaruna practise to cause snakes of the viper species to strike into a liver repeatedly so as to inject the snake posion all through it before starting to rot the liver out. The poison when finished is a black gummy mass resembling tar, and is carried in a short section or joint of bamboo, about three to four inches in length by an inch in diameter. A dart quiver, and a gourd filled with raw wild cotton are usually attached to the poison receptacle so that these three essentials are usually carried in one bundle.

The guns are twelve to fifteen feet in length, some of them lined with split thigh-bones of small monkeys or large birds to give a very smooth bore. They are made in two pieces, longitudinally, and held together by strips of cotton that the Indians weave themselves, soaked in rubber, so that they are firmly held together and the interior is always dry and impervious to the very heavy rainfalls of the region. The mouthpiece is invariably made of bone. They are very expert with these guns, and get birds on the wing almost without a miss.

IN MANY ways these savages are more intelligent and enterprising than their civilized brethren of the highlands and the coast. And if judgment be based on the houses they build, the premium must be awarded to the savage. They live in various sub or divisional tribes of from a hundred and fifty to two hundred or more individuals each. The various divisions generally live in villages of two or three communal houses, protected by a fighting-tower.

The houses are built in the form of large truncated cones, about fifteen feet to the cornice and thirty feet to the peak of the roof, which is built with a high pitch to shed the rain easily, the thatch being of interwoven palm-leaves, each leaf six to eight feet in length. The rafters and roof are supported by six chonta palm-trunks placed equidistant, three on a side. Each house will accommodate easily fifty to seventy-five people. The door or entrance is through one of the bays of the cone at the end of the house. Immediately in front of the entrance is placed the stand of arms, in which are kept the spears, bows, arrows and guns. The center and sides are occupied by the beds, and the opposite bay is devoted to the making and storage of pottery. Provisions are hung from the rafters in baskets, the fiber for which is obtained by beating out certain species of bark.

The walls of the houses are made of straight canes, standing perpendicularly (class, *Caña Brava*), stripped of their spines. The selected canes are as nearly as possible of equal size. The butts are firmly fixed in the ground and the tops tied to the frame supporting the roof with strands of bejuco, a fibrous plant or vine with long tendrils that is very flexible

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when green, almost unbreakable when dry, and does not rot. The canes are spaced approximately an inch apart, the light coming in through the interstices. There are no windows. The sole opening is the door.

THE beds are very interesting. They are built to hold from four to six individuals each. They consist of a rectangular frame surrounding a lattice work of bamboo strips. The strips in the lattice extend from head to foot, are half an inch wide each and separated the one from the other by quarter-inch spaces. They are bound together by interlaces of fine cord, the cord is twisted twice between each strip, so as to firmly hold it, the rows of cord being about eight inches apart from top to bottom. The strips are smoothed and polished till they shine, and when finally bound in position, the whole forms a very effective spring, yielding easily to any change in position of the body. The head end of the framework is at an elevation of about three feet, whereas the foot is only two feet from the floor so that the bed is on a slope. The length of the framed lattice is only to about the middle of the thigh; the ankles rest on a cross pole beyond which is placed eighteen inches from the floor.

Between the end of the lattice and the ankle pole there is no support, but on the ground under this space three smudge logs are arranged in the position of the radii of a three-cornered star, the three burning ends in the center and together. The logs slowly smolder while the Indian slumbers, the smoke diminishing somewhat the plague of mosquitoes and gnats. Unless some of the individuals are lucky enough to own a thin cotton undershirt, they use no covering at all at night but sleep absolutely naked, men, women and children all together.

DURING the day the men wear a loin-cloth which falls to just above the knee and which is held on by being tucked under a stout bark fiber string which is tied tightly around the waist. The women wear a similar loin-cloth, and some of them a sleeveless loose chemise as well. The children wear nothing. The cloth is woven by the women from wild cotton that grows plentifully through the forest and is fairly fine in texture, and as a rule is dyed maroon in color. They also weave long narrow strips like ribbons; these are not dyed but colored threads are woven into them in fairly good semi-geometrical designs. These they use for ornamentation of the hair and in the construction of ornaments for the person. The hair is worn banged in front, a straight line across the forehead; another square cut is made just below the ears and the hair at the back is gathered together and tied with ribbon or cord in the form of a queue. Some of the young bucks wear brightly colored flowers made of feathers at the top of the queue.

The body painting is in various designs, some limiting themselves to a mere touch of color here and there, others putting on weird patterns. The colors are usually red and black, but blue is also sometimes used. On the occasion of feasts, of which there are plenty when not at war, they bedeck themselves in gorgeous ornaments—crowns of scarlet, blue, yellow and white feathers, long pendents from the shoulders, also of feathers, long hanging breast and back bands of intricate design made of beads, bones of birds, parti-colored seeds all highly polished and intermingled with small but brilliant feathers, belt bands of similar design, pendents from the ears six to eight inches in length made up of dozens of golden bronze beetle wings, necklaces of monkeys' teeth around their necks, as well as beads, buttons and colored pebbles—all are piled on the person in profusion, the amount of ornamentation depending on the enterprise of the owner in making or collecting this form of wealth. The gorgeous plumage of the tropical birds gives them an endless variety of shades to select their feathers from.

THESE tribes do not distend perforations in the lobes of the ears to any great extent, as do the Orellenes of central Peru, in whose lobes a small saucer can easily be carried. Holes of quarter- and half-inch diameters, however, are common, but are used more for carrying small objects than for ornamentation. They take the place of a pocket as it were. Any one of them who is lucky enough to own a steel needle wraps it up in cotton and puts it in a little box made out of a bamboo shoot, and then carries the box in the lobe of his ear, it never leaving him either night or day. It is considered a mark of beauty that the teeth should be stained black.

They are very clean, not only as to their persons but as to their camps and houses as well. They live about half the time in the water. Anything obtained from a white man is instantly plunged in the river and washed, no matter what the article is. Any stranger approaching a camp is immediately hailed with the question "*Aschmon?*" "Are you well?" Nor will they allow any one ill to land on their shores, no matter what the illness might be, as in times past the tribes have been bitterly decimated by smallpox and measles, the latter disease seeming to be very fatal to them.

THEY are nomadic by disposition, seldom staying in one encampment longer than a few months; and when the spirit moves them they must go, no matter how much trouble they have been at in the construction of their buildings. They invariably have three or four plantations growing in different localities at the same time. These are cultivated by the women, of course. This provides them against starvation in case of being driven from an encampment by a sudden descent of the enemy, or when tiring of a location from overlong use they feel that they must move to a new location.

Their crops are mostly yuccas, yams, Indian corn and plantains. The corn is all small eared, and of the variety where the grains are scattered irregularly on the cob, the kernels not growing in straight rows. Many black kernels are scattered in with the yellow. Salt they mine themselves from extensive deposits in the forests. Some of the tribes do not use salt at all. They use a great deal of fish, obtaining them both by spearing and by traps. The hook and line they are unfamiliar with.

There are many other things that might be written about their beliefs, superstitions, canoe manufacture, means of communication, drum signaling, feasts, funerals, sickness and death and tribal life in general, but to attempt any sort of an intelligible description would extend this letter into book length and completely transcend the limits of an ordinary letter, even to a magazine.—R. M. WHITEHEAD.

ONE of you sent me a letter from some of his old bunkies now in France, men with whom he had served in our Army before the war. It was written long before

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you read this, back in the first half of 1917, but the spirit of America it breathes is not a matter of dates.

It is not a matter of the war alone, but of peace as well, of the whole future of our country. In peace we know that our country is ridden by political rottenness, by those who do not know the meaning of patriotism and whose one aim is their own selfish gain, cost our country what it may. Often it is disheartening to contemplate the widespread corruption—graft, pull, trickery, lies, greed. But then you get a glimpse of the thing you see burning in this letter. Inside, down underneath, buried deep but strong, you find this flame of real patriotism. Perhaps under a humble or rough exterior, perhaps under a gilded or a frivolous one. Often it takes a mighty war to make it show itself. But it is there. For peace as well as for war. And it is our country's hope and dependence.

AND we must keep those fires burning. They must not be allowed to die down out of sight when war is over. Peace needs them too.

God bless the Americans who wrote this letter and all others in whom burns this fire.

The "Fighting Freddie" (Funston) referred to is the bulldog mascot of their old company down on the Border. "Banjo" is the name the comrade who received the letter formerly gave to shovels, a comrade, by the way, who ached to join his buddies over there but stuck to the duty of taking care of his dependent mother. Some of you know how much courage that kind of duty takes. Here is part of his letter which enclosed theirs:

It brings out the feelings of those men who have gone to sacrifice their all for us, those men to whom we shall have to feel ourselves indebted for all time for the sacrifice they have made that our most glorious Nation may go on its way of Freedom and Democracy. It tells—— Oh, well, go on and read it; you'll find it more interesting than what I could write.

Somewhere in France.

DEAR FRIEND JACK:

We have found a little paper, which is very scarce, and time, which is very plentiful, so we will drop you a few lines from the boys who still remember you and your old line of talk, which same we wish we had floating around now. At times we are awakened from our peaceful slumbers by the *ziz, zis, zis* of old "Jerry," as the "Tommies" call them, and when he comes he always brings a *big* basket of "*big hard-boiled eggs*" and doesn't give a —— where he drops them.

NIGHT before last M Co. lost her first man and two wounded, all new men. The wounded ones are now at the base hospital. Thirty minutes after the bomb landed all that could be seen were "banjoes" and the dirt flying.

As each day goes by they dig one foot deeper. Even now, eight o'clock, we can hear the big guns playing "Stars and Stripes Forever" with a bass accompaniment, and, Jack, there is nothing to compare with these 12-, 14-, and 16-inch guns in action. And as we lay in our dugouts at night and feel old mother earth tremble like a ball of jelly we get callouses on our backs from trying to dig deeper. Talk about Fourth of July fireworks, this Fourth will show the world a celebration that even the devil will tremble at, and believe me your old pals will do their part.

SAY, Jack, if we could get another trip like the one to the Border it would be like a vacation to this one. You, no doubt, have seen dogs run away from other ones; well, that is the way that the Huns run from us Yanks as we up and over. Jack, that is the time we wish that we had you here to sing some of your "wild and woolly" songs. The Yanks will show the world that they *are* all that they claim to be and will make Old Glory the flag to be respected forever.

AS WE left N. Y. Harbor at 4 P.M. all N. Y. was out to bid us a pleasant voyage and safe return. When we passed the Statue of Liberty little did we realize what it really meant to live under the Stars and Stripes, but that day that we return and pass that same statue we can look at it in a different light and see that after all there's no place like the U. S. A. Jack, when you hear the "Star-Spangled Banner" played, stand up at "attention" and say, "Thank God, I'm an American citizen!" With the first strains of that we throw back our shoulders and it makes us want to fight like ——. We may have lots of things to put up with here, but we never grumble nor care, as long as it is for our country and every one in it.

All we can see is to finish this and do it quick, so that we can all eat our Xmas dinner back in God's country once more.

Well, Jack, it is close to taps and all lights must be out, so with this goes our best regards to you and your mother and also our "Fighting Freddie.'"

FROM ALL YOUR OLD PALS OF M Co.

P. S.—I, Black-cat, got the paper, Roy started the letter and got cramps, so Ed had to finish it.

SINCE "The Ace" sent us the above letter he received the following, telling of the death at the front of one of these comrades:

Chicago.

I have just received the information that Private J. Edgar Carroll, one of the writers, has just died from pneumonia, while in the service of Our Country, somewhere "over there." It certainly was quite a blow to me, as he certainly was a man's man—you know, one of those men that one can always depend upon, one that would share his last five-cent piece with you. I can never forget the favors that he has performed for me.

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HE WAS an old member of the old "Tombstone Squad," of which I was a member and which quite a few will remember. He afterward was promoted to cook and he sure saw that we fellows got enough to eat, as soon as he got on the job. Nothing lazy about him. And no matter what time it was, why, he always had a bite to eat and a cigar for me, which the latter was considered a luxury.

Another little incident which I remember was on account of my eyes which did not fit in with the awful heat down there until I got used to it. He saw that I was getting headaches, so took off his goggles and gave them to me, saying, "Here, take these; you need them worse than I do."

Yes, sir, he was a soldier and a gentleman from the very first word and I know fully well that the boys are sure going to miss old "Toots" Carroll, for a better man was never a member of old M o' the First.

I thought that probably when that letter did come out you might want to add a few lines as a tribute to one who was a soldier and a gentleman.—"THE ACE."

P. S.—I also have that pair of goggles with me now, and I certainly am going to keep them in remembrance of my old friend.

IF, AFTER you've read the story in this issue by Eugene P. Lyle, Jr., you care to translate it into international terms you will find a double meaning in it. If you don't care to, just read it as a story and enjoy it.

It was written before the count was finished for Germany.

AT THIS writing late in November the Republican and Democratic parties furnish us with an amusing spectacle. Neither one of them can decide upon a general policy to adopt. They are anxious to find some fine platform that will bring them votes and power, but neither one can find it.

It's been generations since either one of them had a really fundamental and permanent platform to stand on. They've had to depend on hand-to-mouth methods in espousing principles and causes, have had to seize on this or that immediate issue and brand it as their own for a vote-getter. Generally their method has been to fight all new ideas tooth and toe-nail, then find some day that this or that new idea had gained considerable popular backing, then, one or the other, grab it and adopt it. The one that didn't grab it would, of course, take the opposite side. (Do you remember how they used to hoot, both of them, at the planks of the old Populist party? And now you'll find that between them they've adopted nearly all of those planks.)

BUT just now all the issues lying around look dangerous. Neither the Democratic or the Republican machine can figure out just which ones to pick up, or, if they did pick one up, which side to take. All they're sure of is that, whatever issue is picked up by one of them and whichever side of it is adopted, the other party machine will promptly adopt the other side of it. They're like two runners ready to run in opposite directions, but neither one can make a start in any direction, so they just stand there back to back and don't get anywhere. And incidentally they look darned ridiculous.

THEY *are* darned ridiculous. The only thing any more ridiculous in this country is ourselves—for taking them so seriously and letting them hold so much power.

THE other and smaller parties have, generally speaking, something more real and permanent to stand on. But they won't have if they become the leading parties. They, too, will fall victims to the party system as it exists in this country. By splitting up, if not by the usual development.

THE blame, of course, falls on the people themselves. Parties are necessary as instruments for forwarding different sets of at least comparatively fundamental opinions. But we have made them ends instead of instruments, too many of us falling into party-idolatry and giving loyalty to party even before country. As a result we have grown careless as to whether they represent fundamental opinions or not, merely voting on whatever assortment of issues they find it to their own interest to deal us. And as a result of that result, fundamental issues have a hard time coming up for decision or even for thought. We're too busy with parties to have time or thought for the really vital problems.

EVEN on the planks they do see fit to present to us we can't vote with any free choice or discrimination. We have to vote for one bunch of planks or for another bunch. We may not like all the planks in any bunch, but we have to vote for all of them just the same. We may be strong for some of the planks in the other bunches, but we have to vote against them just the same.

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In fact, we have to do about what the parties want all around.

It seems sort of stupid on our part.

There are remedies, of course, but it's more comfortable and easy-going to let the parties handle everything, including us.

A COMRADE sends the rest of us his recipe for making an auto into a sleeping-bunk:

St. Charles, Mich.

The front seats in the Studebaker 1916 and '17 models are twin, removable, and are set on a bench about four inches high. I removed the bench from the car and sawed a four-inch section from the center of it; then fastened each seat in its place on the divided bench and then returned them to their place on the floor of the car, using a heavy screen door-hook to prevent them tipping backward.

I NEXT removed the rear cushion and the slats and then took out the metal front-piece, substituting a wooden one which fits in behind the cleats at either end. This wooden front-piece is held firmly in place when the slat and cushion are returned to place. This arrangement allows me to take out all the seats, leaving the entire floor space empty, but with an open space where the front seats belong. This I filled by fitting in a floor-board. Now, then, for why?

WHEN the good wife and I, or two of us fellows, want to go fishing we take a three-quarter width mattress in place of the rear seat. On reaching our destination it takes us just five minutes to unhook and take out the front seats and other duffel and make our bed in the bottom of the car. If there are any "skeeters" we pull the curtains. With this arrangement we can make or break camp in jig time. Also we don't have to carry a tent, to say nothing of sleeping on the ground. To this last I do not object, but to say that the wife does is putting it MILD.—GEO. C. GILBERT.

LOOKING AHEAD FOR DEMOCRACY

We live in a time of many and mighty changes. Underneath all the changes runs one powerful, fundamental current—mankind's growing impulse toward a fuller and more real democracy and toward a brotherhood of man that will some day spread throughout the world.

There are many paths to this goal. We see the paths, but we waste time in debating which to follow, we divide and scatter ourselves over them all. For we do *not* clearly see the goal.

We want more democracy, but most of us do not clearly know what democracy is. Our idea of democracy is only general and careless. Almost none of us can reduce it to its bare fundamentals so definitely that we can apply those fundamentals as test and measure of every problem and issue, great or small, that can arise in a nation's life or in an individual's relation to that life. We do not clearly know what democracy is.

It is this ignorance of our goal that most impedes our progress toward it. The logical remedy is to get a clearer understanding, a more definite knowledge, of democracy's real nature and workings. This department is devoted to that purpose.

Democracy is not merely a machine for governing. It is a people's attitude of mind—principles and the daily, widespread, individual practising of those principles. It cannot be created by a vote or a revolution; it must be growth. The only way to stimulate a social growth is education. The particular work of this department is to help spread that education.

Strange as it may seem, such definite, fundamental education in democracy and its practical application is almost unknown. The need is so obvious and so elementary that it has been overlooked. Americans have been so careless, so selfishly busy or so

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absorbed in concrete issues that they have failed to examine carefully into the democracy that they boast and have even forgotten there is need of full, solid, thorough understanding.

If you believe in democracy it is your duty to make sure that you yourself have that thorough understanding and to spread it among others. This department offers you the opportunity to do both.

TO LOOK ahead intelligently we must first know what we are standing on at present and understand the fundamentals of the democracy we are striving to develop rightly to its right fulfilment. We have already considered three of these fundamentals:

(1) Democracy is not just a form of government or a piece of governing machinery. It is a state of mind, an attitude and practise of a people.

(a) Therefore it can be attained only by a gradual growth and education.

(2) You can not further democracy by violating it.

(a) Any autocratic institution, any autocratic element of the people, or any autocratic popular practise or attitude of mind in a democracy violates democracy and checks its progress.

(b) In an already established democracy in which it is possible for the people to bring about changes through the lawful means their democracy provides, the attainment of changes by physical violence is a violation of democracy and in the long run checks its progress or advances it more slowly than democratic methods would advance it. Force can change the form of government; it can not thereby create the new state of mind necessary to make the change real or permanent. Force is the most autocratic thing in the world; its use is reversion to complete autocracy.

(3) Autocracy is rule of the many by the few. It does not matter who the few may be. Kings, peasants, capital, labor, party, politicians or other individuals, creed—*any* few, *any* minority, who rule the many are autocrats and their rule is autocracy, no matter how lofty their aims.

BEFORE considering the state of mind and the practise that alone are democracy, let us take up one or two current problems in determining the form of government, the method and machinery that best express a true democratic spirit or attitude.

The German war and the upheavals following it are only stages, violent and quick stages, in the fundamental struggle between autocracy and democracy. Economists who claim all political, economic and social changes are merely the results of economic pressures are perhaps a little drunk with their own wine. To claim that mankind in the mass is moved, fundamentally, only by the needs of its belly and its back is as sweeping and unsound as to claim that individual man, who over and over again has sacrificed all material things for principle or right, is moved only by these same bodily needs—like an animal.

Economic determinism is a mighty but only a contributing factor in mankind's evolution.

EVEN if the struggle between autocracy and democracy were not the fundamental one it is certainly the immediate issue that confronts us. We've been fighting to "make the world safe for democracy." Having fought and won, we're looking more closely than ever before at what we've fought for—democracy. And more and more of us either are dissatisfied with the brand of it we now have or are confused and alarmed by certain things committed in its name.

This dissatisfaction and confusion are themselves a step forward. We Americans are a conceited people and heavy sleepers. Long ago we lulled ourselves to sleep with the idea that we were the freest and most democratic people in the world. The war has served to wake us up quite considerably and we're beginning to realize that we've been asleep and that the idea about our own perfection as a democracy is far from being so true as we once thought. That is a decided gain.

WHY are some of us dissatisfied? Because, having had the war search-light turned so strongly upon democracy and having been forced to consider democracy in other lands, we have become more keenly alive to the imperfections of our own democracy. We are seeing more and more ways in which ours is *not* a government by the people, *not* a government for the people. And seeing an evil is the first step toward a remedy.

Why are some of us confused? A chief reason is that we have seen the war force democracies into autocratic methods in order to preserve their very existence. Because we have seen that autocratic Germany, both in war and in the economic organization back of her armies, was far more efficient than were the opposing democracies—until these democracies adopted Germany's autocratic methods, centered their war power in one man's hands, organized their economic systems on autocratic lines. Our victory for democracy looks like a victory for autocracy.

YET there is a simple answer. The democracies still exist, German autocracy has fallen. The decision against it on the field of battle may have been due to outside causes, but the decision against it by the German people themselves is a direct victory of democracy over autocracy even if the Germans slip back temporarily into the latter. The real answer, however, is scattered all over the world in the increased impetus among the peoples toward democracy. Either they don't see that it has become more centralized and autocracized or are going to have it anyhow, or else, laying too much stress on its autocratization, they mean to take democracy to pieces and reshape it to such an extent that it's likely not to be democracy at all.

Much confusion. The world has been taught a great truth, but for the most part is still looking at the half-truths that appeared along with it.

This great truth is that autocracy tends toward oppression and efficiency (or the machinery for efficiency) while democracy tends toward liberty and inefficiency; that either one is imperfect as now operative, and that a golden mean between these two extremes must be found.

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AND closer examination will show that this golden mean, instead of being a backward movement for democracy, is really a forward movement toward fuller and more real democracy.

The solution is simple. Democracy must be made to tend toward efficiency as well as liberty. The only way to get efficiency is to centralize control into as few hands as possible; not only Germany but our whole business, industrial and general experience has proved that plainly. But this, of course, would be merely autocracy and therefore it is not safe.

So we must find a means of making it "safe for democracy." To name the means is easy; to learn the practise of it is not so easy, though no more difficult than any of the other steps toward real democracy. All that is necessary is to centralize control in the hands of a few and *then make these few responsible and responsive to the many to such a degree that the many are at all times the real masters.* Put the *delegated* control in the hands of a few and thereby get efficiency; put the *fundamental* control in the hands of the many and thereby ensure democracy.

THERE is nothing new about the theory of it. In a crude, half-blind way we are already doing it, but our present methods are very crude indeed and we are a long way from seeing clearly what we are doing. Our centralization of delegated power is imperfect, irregular, unsystematic; it must be made into a carefully ordered and co-ordinated machine that would meet the efficiency tests of the best organized business in the country. Our fundamental control by the many is even more imperfect —often almost a joke.

To improve our centralization will be comparatively easy. It is always easier to be autocratic than to be democratic. But unless we make at least equal speed in putting on the necessary check of fundamental control by the many we shall merely glide into autocracy. The few must hold the delegated executive control, but their *responsibility* must be made fully equal to their power. It must be made direct responsibility, and it must be made constant, not operative only at intervals of several years.

Executive actions will not be made inefficient by too much "interference" from the people. Any machinery for expressing their will is too large for too frequent use. But the mere fact and knowledge that direct power lies with the people will restrain the few, making them more heedful of the people's wishes, and greatly lessening the need of actual "interference." And, pray, what *is* democracy if keeping the people's hand on the throttle of their own affairs is "interference"?

The few must have full delegated power, but there must never be an instant or an instance in which they are able to use this delegated power contrary to the will of the many.

TWO great things are necessary for attaining and retaining this balance:

(1) A carefully centralized and efficient machine endued with immense delegated power might use that delegated power to get fundamental power as well. If each of the hundreds of thousands who compose that machine is subject to the few men, or the man, who is its directing head, all of them are in his power so far as holding, or getting, their places is concerned. They can be compelled into a voting-machine taking orders from the head and used in even more illegitimate ways.

The remedy against that is a combination of (a) removal by direct vote of the people, (b) more direct control by the many over legislative and executive acts, (c) a wide extension of what we call the civil service reform movement for the selecting and retaining of public employees, officials, not by political appointment and control but according to merit and ability as determined by competitive examination and past record, and (d) enforcement of the people's will by a lawful method other than ballot or standing laws, a method to be considered later.

(2) The second great task in ensuring free as well as efficient democracy is to make the people, the many, see that to provide them with even perfect machinery for exercising their fundamental power over the delegated power of the few is no protection unless they *use* that machinery—use it all the time, use it intelligently, use it honestly and as a matter of duty and obligation. If we Americans really used even the machinery we have now, our troubles and problems would vanish to an amazing extent.

AND the only way, the only possible way, to teach the many the importance and habit of really using their fundamental power and control is *education*—a direct, organized campaign of education in civic responsibility and in democracy. Democracy is a state and habit of mind, an attitude and practise of a people. The mere machinery of democracy, the shell, is of no avail unless the content of democracy be poured into it, unless the democratic state of mind, the democratic habit, fill that shell, make that machinery really operative.

IF SOCIALISM or any other brand of democracy succeeds in centralizing power but fails to build up in at least equal degree the many's fundamental control and the full understanding and practise of such control by the many, then it will only shove us back into autocracy.

AMERICA'S immediate job, then, is to increase and perfect centralization of delegated power in the hands of a few and *at the same time* to strengthen fundamental control by the many, the people, the majority. If the former is done and the latter not done, we shall surely go the downward path of autocracy. And the way to bring about the latter is by working for the extension of civil service reform, by working for greatly increased direct control by the many over office tenure and over legislative and executive acts (for example, by some practical application of the initiative, referendum and recall and by another method, to be considered at a later meeting, of enforcing the people's will at all times), and by working definitely for the education of the American people in their responsibility as holders of the fundamental power.—A. S. H.

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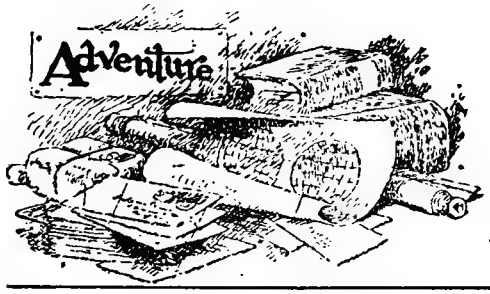

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES FREE TO ANY READER

THESE services of *Adventure* are free to *any one*. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you *read and observe the simple rules*, thus saving needless delay and trouble for you and us. The whole spirit of this magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we *can* help you we're ready and willing to try.

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, each printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

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A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying.*

Back Issues of *Adventure*

WILL BUY: Issues for November, 1910, March and October, 1911, May, 1912, June, 1914, June, 1915, June, 1916, and Mid-Mar., 1918. Twenty cents each—M. R. GREY, Van Wert, Ohio.

WILL BUY: One copy Sept., 1911, *Adventure*—ARTHUR WENDELL, 456 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

WILL BUY: Nov., Dec., 1910; Jan. to Sept., inclusive, 1911; Feb., 1913. State price.—R. W. DEDEKIND, 1913 Parish Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

WILL SELL: Jan. to June, 1914; Feb., 1917, to Dec., 1918. Thirty-eight copies for $3.00, plus postage.—F. A EDWARDS, Morrisville, North Carolina.

WILL SELL: May, June, Aug., Mid-Sept., 1917; also complete file from Mid-Jan. to Mid-Aug., 1918.—LLOYD C. PORTER, Gromas, California.

WILL SELL: Fifty-five different numbers, excellent condition, $5.00. I pay carriage anywhere in U. S. A.—ROBINSON SMITH, 1824 N. Park Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

WILL SELL: For fifteen cents each, plus carriage charges—1914, December; 1915, all but April; 1916, all but Feb. and Mar.; 1917, Jan. and Feb., twenty-four numbers in all.—EDWARD B. BURPEE, 186 No. Main St., Rockland, Maine.

WILL SELL, or trade for 1917 numbers, 1918, Mid-May to Mid-Dec., inclusive.—R. W. TIMNEY, Fairland, Indiana.

WILL SELL: Complete file from July, 1916 to date, ten cents plus carriage charges.—M. A. RUSSELL, 603 Durden St., Vidalia, Georgia.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Letter-Friends Back Home

A Free Service Department for Allied Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Others in Camp, at the Front, or in Hospital. Americans Excluded by Order of the U. S. War Department.

Any one in the Allied service who wishes to brighten the time with letters from "back home" or wherever else this magazine circulates, and with the personal touch and interest of hitherto unknown friends, can secure these letters and these friends by sending us his name and military address to be published once in this department. Among our readers of both sexes, all classes and from all parts of the world, he is likely to gain a number of friendly, personal correspondents. He is free to answer only such as he is comfortably able to answer under the conditions that surround him, and it is even suggested that the number of correspondents for any one man be determined by the needs of his comrades as well as by his own.

This magazine, of course, assumes no responsibility other than the publishing of these names and addresses as its space will permit. Experience has shown that the service offered is a very real and needed one, and all not themselves in service are asked to do their part in making the daily life of those Allies who fought in our defense brighter and pleasanter through personal friendships across the intervening miles and by whatever personal, human kindnesses such friendships may suggest. This service is offered to Allied fighters only. The War Regulations of the U. S. Army make it impossible to acquaint letter-friends with the names of strange Americans.

When giving your military address make it as permanent a one as possible.

No. 1003831 PVT. BORDEN HALL, Employed Staff, Canadian Trench Warfare School, Boxhill-on-Sea, Sussex, England.

Mail Address and Forwarding Service.

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Addresses

Order of the Restless—Organizing to unite for fellowship all who feel the wanderlust. First suggested in this magazine, though having no connection with it aside from our friendly interest. Address WAYNE EBERLY, 1302 N. St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

High-School Volunteers of the U. S.—An organization promoting a democratic system of military training in American high schools. Address *Everybody's*, Spring and Macdougal Streets, New York City.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Remember

Magazines are made up ahead of time. An item received today is too late for the current issue; allow for two to three months between sending and publication.

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the department in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested, inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert will probably give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their departments subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but for their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided stamped and addressed envelope is enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular department whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose department it seems to belong.**

1. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Also temporarily covering South American coast from Valparaiso south around the Cape and up to the River Plate. Ports, trade, peoples, travel.

2. The Sea Part 1
B. W. BRINTNALL, 5527 Thirty-third Ave., N. E., Seattle, Wash. Covering ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S. and British Empire; seafaring on fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks, small-boat sailing, and old-time shipping and seafaring.

3. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Cove Cottage, Pembroke West, Bermuda. Such questions as pertain to the sea, ships and men local to the U. S. should be sent to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brintnall.

4. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Covering Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks, Chesapeake Bay; river, lake and road travel, game, fish and woodcraft; furs, freshwater pearls, herbs; and their markets.

5. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Johnson City, Tenn. Covering Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, and N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

6. Eastern U. S. Part 3
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 44 Central Street, Bangor, Maine. Covering Maine; fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

7. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23d St., Los Angeles, Calif. Covering California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

8. Western U. S. Part 2
CAPT.-ADJ. JOSEPH MILLS HANSON, care *Adventure*. Covering the Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. *Especially* early history of Missouri valley.

9. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 4249A Juniata St., St. Louis, Mo. Covering Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Omaha. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big timber sections.

10. Western U. S. Part 4 and Mexico Part 1
J. W. ROBERTSON, 913 W. Lynn Street, Austin, Texas. Covering Texas, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and the border states of old Mexico: Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas.

11. Mexico Part 2
WILLIAM BROCKWAY, Oriental Park, Marianao, Cuba. Covering Central and Southern Mexico below a line drawn from Tampico to Mazatlan. History, geography, customs, government, animals, minerals, products and industries.

12. North American Snow Countries Part 1
ROBERT E. PINKERTON, 5036 Utica St., Denver, Colo.

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Covering Minnesota, Wisconsin, Manitoba, a strip of Ontario between Minn. and C. P. Ry. Canoes and snowshoes; methods and materials of Summer and Winter subsistence, shelter and travel, for recreation or business.

13. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 2
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Covering Height of Land and northern parts of Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. R'y); southeastern parts of Ungava and Keewatin. Trips for sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Summer, Autumn and Winter outfits; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber; customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit.

14. ★ North American Snow Countries Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Gravenhurst, Muskoka, Ont., Canada. Covering Southern Ontario and Georgian Bay. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing.

15. North American Snow Countries Part 4
ED. L. CARSON, Clear Lake, Wash. Covering Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

16. North American Snow Countries Part 5
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Covering Alaska. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipments, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

17. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, Honolulu, T. H. Covering customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

18. Central America
EDGAR YOUNG, 84 Court Street, Brooklyn, N. Y. Covering Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, customs, language, game, local conditions, minerals, trading.

19. Asia, Southern
GORDON MCCREAGH, 21 East 14th St., New York City. Covering Red Sea, Persian Gulf, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Siam, Andamans, Malay States, Borneo, the Treaty Ports; hunting, trading, traveling.

20. Japan and Korea
(Editor to be appointed.) Covering travel, hunting, customs of people, art and curios. (Mr. Ritchie, the former editor of this section, is now in France. His section is accordingly in abeyance until we find a suitable successor.)

21. Russia and Eastern Siberia
CAPTAIN A. M. LOCHWITZKY (Formerly Lieut.-Col. I. R. A., Ret.), Quartermaster, U. S. Troops, Mercedes, Texas. Covering Petrograd and its province; Finland, Northern Caucasus; Primorsk District, Island of Sakhalien; travel, hunting, fishing; explorations among native tribes; markets, trade, curios.

22. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Eagle Bird Mine, Washington, Nevada Co., Calif. Covering the Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, the Niger River from the delta to Jebba Northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora; tribal histories, witchcraft, savagery.

23. Africa Part 2
GEORGE E. HOLT, Frederick, Md. Covering Morocco; travel, tribes, customs, history, etc.

24. ★ Africa Part 3 Portuguese East Africa
R. W. WARING, Corunna, Ontario, Canada. Covering trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc.

25. Africa Part 4 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East Africa, Uganda, and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Care Authors' League of America, 33 West 42d St., New York. Covering geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, mining, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, opportunities for adventure and sport.

26. ★ New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Covering New Zealand, Cook Islands and Samoa. Travel, history, customs; opportunities for adventurers, explorers and sportsmen.

27. Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, 1106 Van Nuys Building, Los Angeles, Cal. Covering customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, politics, history.

STANDING INFORMATION

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Sup't of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, H. I. Also, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Agri., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal Northwest Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects, age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Commission, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelope with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

The following "Ask Adventure" editors are now serving in our military forces. We hope you will be patient if their answers are at times delayed: Capt.-Adj. Joseph Mills Hanson; Capt. A. M. Lochwitzky.

Dog-Breeding for Alaskans

THE subjoined question and answer may be regarded as supplementary, in a sense, to the very interesting account, also written by Mr. Solomons, on dog traction in Alaska, that appeared in "Ask Adventure" of the issue for September 18, 1918:

Question:—"I am an interested reader of *Adventure*, and seeing your name in connection with traveling in Alaska I would like to ask if the people there still use dog-teams for traveling purposes. If so will you please tell me if there are many men who make it a business to raise dogs for that purpose?

"Where do they obtain the dogs? Do they import them, or have they got regular kennels?

"I am very fond of dogs and think that this would be a good job but I am too young to start in business yet, so I would like to know if there is any other means of travel which would wipe out dog-teams within five years."—H. MEISOLL, Brooklyn, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Without reflecting in any way on my other wideawake correspondents, it is due you to say that your letter is the most interesting and thoughtful inquiry I have received for a long time. If you hadn't asked the question I intended before long to ask some friend to ask it, so I could tell you young fellows how to engage in congenial and profitable enterprise in Alaska.

A few men have made dog-raising a business in a small way, and many others, of course, have just "raised dogs" for themselves, and sold the surplus. But in my opinion a handsome profit, if not a small fortune, awaits the man who goes at it scientifically and efficiently.

Answering your last question first, for it is the pivot of the subject, you need not fear that traveling by dog-team will ever go out of fashion in Alaska, or anywhere else in the North where the snow "lays" for long periods. It is the logical method of travel and of carrying light loads and doing light freighting. Nothing can take its place, except of course on the highways at and between large points which may be thickly populated (for Alaska). There teams of horses and motor vehicles are, and will be, used.

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But there will be few such localities for years and years and years to come in Alaska, as compared with the hundreds of points all over the territory where men work and travel.

In Alaska it is obviously too expensive to maintain such highways as I speak of except in localities where intensive travel and transport exist, for this expense is greater in the North, naturally, than out here in the States, and the populations necessary to justify such expenditures will rarely exist. But even if dogs passed out of use for business travel and freighting, there would still be a large market for them for pleasure, recreation, sport, and means of moving out into all side-country.

If you like dogs you will be interested in raising them, and I would suggest that when you get ready you study the thing thoroughly and go into the country to do it.

The dogs are obtained from Siberia and from the natives of Alaska—as to "native" dogs, malamutes and huskies—and from the States as to ordinary breeds such as hounds, bird-dogs, collies, and others, that have been found valuable or satisfactory by different "mushers." Various cross-breeding has been experimented with, of course, and opinions differ, but the general tendency has been to stick to the native varieties, picking the best, just as we do with horses, sheep and all other animals—perpetuating individual excellences found by chance here and there among the native dogs.

The outside dog has his good points, which show up in the mixed breed, but it is found that long years of natural evolution produced a strain in the native huskies which is perfectly suited to the country and to the work, where the individual dog himself is all right. The natives have had little sense, or little care, in the matter of breeding the best individuals and suppressing the others, and hence it was that so many of the native dogs were inferior, and the effort was made to use outside dogs and native dogs crossed with outside dogs. This, as I say, has largely been abandoned, though many dog-mushers still prefer an outside or part outside leader—but as much for companionship, a reminder of things "in the States," I fancy, as for any other reason.

Some maintain that in the outside or part outside dog you get a higher intelligence and greater docility and obedience, but the high-bred native dog is hard to beat as to all of these qualities, while his greater ruggedness and general adaptiveness to the physical and climatic conditions constitute advantages which are of much importance.

Now the point is that there are comparatively few *good* dogs in Alaska, taking into account the thousands that are in use, and a good dog bears the same relation to efficient and satisfactory dog-team travel that a good horse does to buggy use or team use. And, by the way, you should raise dogs for both purposes, and the one is not fit for the other. A draft dog is as distinct in his qualities from a running dog as a draft horse is from a running horse. Imagine the result in a dog-team of say five dogs, when each dog is different as to speed, temperament, and the like.

I have no doubt but that a little outside dog in the native dog would be an improvement, especially for light travel, and it is up to the intelligent and systematic breeder for the market to ascertain what that blend is. No two Alaskans will agree exactly on these points, but the truth is there somewhere to be ascertained by some fellow like you.

If you get the right place and raise, or rather capture, your own feed—and that is mostly what I mean by "the right place"—you can raise dogs for very little per dog, and you can get fifty dollars apiece for them like a breeze—now and twenty years from now. It's a big chance. Go to it.

Some Business-Like Questions

HERE'S a young man who knows exactly what he's good for, and what he wants to find out—a refreshing contrast to the inquirer who tells nothing about himself and blandly requests the "Ask Adventure" expert to tell him "all about" some few thousand square miles of territory:

Question:—"I notice in the Service Bureau of *Adventure* that your field covers Central America. I thought possibly you may also be able to give information concerning Colombia. In the following questions I am referring to both territories. If it is impossible for you to give me any information of Colombia possibly you may be able to refer me to some one that can.

"I am planning to go to Colombia or Central America, the one that offers the greater possibilities, just as soon as my service for the country is finished. I will now tell you something of myself and past occupations. I am twenty-three years of age and have a high-school education. Am used to a Southern climate—South Carolina. Have a very good idea of farming. Have one year's experience in felling trees with a logging-gang. Have two years' experience as auto repairer and chauffeur. When my enlistment expires will have had four years of electrical work in the Navy.

"I would like to know something of the mining possibilities of these countries; also if you think any one that's not afraid of and is able to do hard work, could go to either of these countries and make at least one hundred dollars clear of necessary expenses per month?

"I have no knowledge of mining and would like information as to where I could get literature, etc., that would help me any. Would you suggest that I try mining? Or some other occupation may hold a more alluring and a more substantial proposition.

"Here are a few direct questions I would like you to answer: Are the mining regions open to newcomers to stake a claim? What kind of deposits are found? Are the laws of the countries favorable to mining operations?

"What are the laws in regard to carrying firearms? Might I be able to secure a position in some mine in order to get a practical working knowledge? Are the countries considered normally healthy in the mining regions? What are the chances of a prospective electrical engineer?

"Is the white population very large? What language should be spoken in order to understand the natives?"—O. P. Hydrick, League Island Navy Yard, Philadelphia, Pa.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—From the personal knowledge I have concerning Colombia it is a good country to keep away from. It is at once the poorest country for any newcomer to try in all Latin America. Their money is away down (peso worth

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about one cent of our money), and the native people are especially hard to do business with in any form or fashion. Also they hate a white American like poison, due to the Panama trouble in 1905. There are some few Americans up in the mining country near the capital, and if you were in right with one of these companies it would be all right to land down there. But for a "spec" proposition better pass up Colombia. The low country along both coasts of this country is unhealthy and no effort is being made to better it.

I believe you could find work in your line at the San Juancito mine near Tegucigalpa, Honduras, as there are usually several hundred Americans employed there. The United Fruit Company also employs white men in most of the Central American countries. You can get the addresses of the resident officials from an official railway guide under the heading "United Fruit Company." Also write the Panama Canal, Washington, D. C., for their booklet dealing with current conditions on the zone. That is one of the best places to break into the tropics from.

Yes, you should clear one hundred dollars if you landed any kind of a position at all, for they usually run from one hundred and twenty-five to one hundred and seventy-five dollars with free quarters.

Write Department of Commerce, Washington, D. C., for their free booklets covering mining in Central America. Also write Mr. John Barrett, Director-General, Pan-American Union, Washington, D. C., for booklet "Nicaragua," which gives some good points on mining in this republic.

The mining regions of all Central America, except British Honduras, are open to newcomers.

Gold is found in ores, stringer veins, pockets, alluvial deposits and in the sands of the streams. International Correspondence School, Scranton, Pennsylvania, has some good books on mining.

Yes, most of them allow free entry of mining machinery.

Firearms laws almost non-existent if under .44 caliber.

Yes, you could gain practical experience by getting employment in some mine.

The mining regions are, as a rule, the healthier because they are located at a fair altitude.

I consider your chances good with any of the larger companies.

There are some but not a great many white men scattered all over Central America.

Spanish is the natives' language.

Waterproofing Compounds

THIS recipe may save many an adventurer from colds and aching bones; also a few addresses that it may prove handy to have on tap:

Question:—"Could you please tell me the name of a preparation or the name of the different parts to make a preparation that will make tenting canvas leak and mildew proof, also that will not make the canvas stiff?

"And would you kindly tell me the name of a firm in New York that deals in outing supplies and sporting goods of all sorts?"—GLENN G. MAKIN, U. S. Naval Hospital, Portsmouth, Va.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—There are many waterproofing compounds. The regular circus-tent compound is paraffin dissolved in benzine, pound to the gallon, and painted on with a wide paintbrush. Sears, Roebuck & Co., Chicago, Ill., sell gallon cans of waterproof (white and brown), that is used on canvas, to make waterproof. This is better than the paraffin kind; lasts longer.

There are a number of sporting-goods stores on Broadway, below Canal Street, in New York City; Schoverling, Daly and Gales, 302 Broadway, is one of them; eight or ten stores there, a few blocks above Chambers Street.

Army and Navy Equipment Company, 37 West 125th Street, New York City, Francis Bannerman, Army and Navy goods, 501 Broadway, Abbey and Imbrie, 15 Warren Street (fishing tackle), T. H. Conroy, 28 John Street, and Abercrombie and Fitch, Madison Avenue and 45th Street, are other stores.

You'll find that you can obtain cooking utensils and other camping and cooking things at ten-cent stores to better advantage than in some others.

The Lure of Mining in Africa

THERE is a fascination, as well as a danger, incident to wresting Nature's treasures from her reluctant strong places that every born miner knows full well — and Africa adds other fascinations peculiarly her own:

Question:—"Please find enclosed stamped envelope, for which give me the following information:

"What are the chances of obtaining a position with some mining company in South Africa? Am at the present time employed as shift boss at $6.75 per day, but would prefer a like position in Africa where there might be opportunities for entering some business later on.

"Please give the names and addresses of companies most likely to connect with.

"Could I ship from San Francisco?

"I also have a rifle I would like to take along. What are the usual taxes on firearms?"—D. C. CHRISTEN, Bingham, Utah.

Answer, by Mr. Miller:—You ask for information covering South Africa. That part of Africa I know little of. West Africa is my territory. There are several mining companies working the Gold Coast and the tin alluvial deposits of Northern Nigeria and the Pagan Belt. I append their names below. The postage is three cents.

Whites are employed in West Africa on a three-year contract, not often as actual workingmen, but in charge of natives. An experienced miner would have little trouble in landing a job these days. You would not probably better the money you are making, but then your job and the change and chance to see something of the world would make up; I mean that the job as "nigger driver," as we say in Africa, is very fascinating. The Gold Coast is very unhealthy, but the tin-mines of Northern Nigeria aren't so bad, though one is bound to get a dose or two of fever.

There are no ships running from San Francisco to West Africa. You would have to go *via* Liverpool or *via* New York—Genoa Line as far as the Madeira Islands, and transship there to the coast.

There is no tax on firearms, but you have to make

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a deposit on entering the country as a guarantee that you do not sell the gun to the natives. The deposit is returned when you leave, if you have the gun. Licenses come high for big game—as much as two hundred and fifty dollars for elephants—but as you are not likely to find yourself in elephant country that won't disturb you.

Gold Coast mining companies:

Abbontiakon Mines, Limited, 19 St. Swithin's Lane, London, E. C., England.

Abosso Gold Mining Company, 13 Austin Friars, London, E. C. England.

African Mines, Limited, 20 Bucklersbury, London, E. C., England.

Abu Tin Company, 4 Tokenhouse Buildings, London, E. C., England.

Shanghai

"LOOK before you leap" is the finest sort of precautionary advice to white men who take a notion to wander into the countries of other races without first knowing where they can catch on:

Question:—"Please give me some general information about Shanghai, China, concerning climate, customs, employment, etc. Is there a chance of getting the latter with the Standard Oil Company? Can one work their way from Frisco on a passenger? Is the climate very healthful?"—R. A. GUNN, U. S. S. *Monterey.*

Answer, by Mr. McCreagh:—Employment in Shanghai? It is difficult for me to tell you anything definite because you don't say what your qualifications are. As a general rule employment is next to impossible for a white man who has nothing but his two hands and a willingness to work. There are four hundred million natives of the country who have those. Even clerical positions are hard to get because the firms which employ white men in these capacities usually import them, preference being given, of course, to relatives and the friends of friends.

The Standard Oil Company employs a considerable number of men in China. These men are signed on in this country, trained for a few months (paid while learning) and then sent out. You can apply at your local head office for information.

Climate in Shanghai is healthy enough for a white man who doesn't hit the booze.

If you are not afraid of a little hard work you will find no difficulty in working your way on a passenger boat. You can get all the details you want right at your own docks.

However, let me advise you most strongly not to go out to Shanghai, or any other Far Eastern port without enough money to carry you for three or four months—say about three hundred dollars. Jobs don't fall on one from the trees, and a yellow or brown man's country is an awful place for a white man to be stranded in.

The "Native Son" Myth

BANG! goes a lie, treasured along the Atlantic coast more or less, to the effect that a "native son of the Golden West" has the edge over anybody else in California. Shot by E. E. Harriman, A°. D^{i}., 1919, and the pelt nailed on the Los Angeles barn door:

Question:—"I am a chap of much ambition to settle in southern California. I am an automobile repairman by trade; have lived in New York City for twenty years and as lonesome as one could be.

"Which city in southern California do you think I would do best in? Can I make friends there? I am a sociable mortal with a happy disposition. Is it true an easterner is not given much chance?

"What of Los Angeles? Are the people there sociable?

"What would be the best and most moderate way to get there? Will I need any Winter clothing? How are the chances in Winter compared to Summer in making a living in my trade?

"I am a hard worker and a persevering fellow.

"I thank you for your kindness in standing such a cross examination."—MICHAEL LEDER, New York.

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Los Angeles is the largest city in California now and it has more automobiles and auto trucks than any other city.

Where did you get that stuff about an easterner not getting much of a chance? Our population is made up of easterners in the proportion of about three in every five. I am an eastern man myself. I never had any trouble in finding chances. The man who comes here and then goes whining back to the East that an eastern man gets no chance out here, is an angleworm who wouldn't know a chance if it hit him.

I have found the people here just as sociable as I ever did in an eastern city, and more ready to help a stranger.

There is no difference between Winter and Summer in the auto work here. The Winter traffic is just as brisk as Summer.

As to clothing, bring what you have and let it go at that. We are not given to wearing quite as heavy goods in Winter, but there are a good many days when thick clothing comes in handy, during rains.

Regarding the getting here, what other way were you considering besides coming on the train? If you have a Ford or any other car you can come in that. Some men have walked, but I would not advise doing that. There is not much choice, after railroads and autos.

Blue-Water Sailing by Small Boat

CAN one navigate the high seas in a cockle-shell? Maybe not every one can, but some have done it, as witness:

Question:—"Would it be reasonably safe to travel by sea in a thirty-five or forty foot cabin launch—or practical? The idea being to follow the coast line as much as possible.

"Are petroleum fuels obtainable at small South American coast towns?

"Is there a book giving the name, history of discovery and development, and character of the small and little known islands?

"In reading one of Jack London's books I saw reference made to some such book but do not know the name of it. If there is such a book please tell me where one can be obtained."—CHARLES E. NIELSEN, Kelly Field, Texas.

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Answer, by Mr. Brintnall:—It is entirely feasible to travel by sea in a small boat. The launch *Detroit* made the trip across the Atlantic. The *Detroit* is thirty-five feet long, and made the trip without sail. There are several other boats that have made trips across the oceans, among them the *Sea Bird*, a thirty-five foot yawl, and the yawl in which Joshua Slocum sailed alone around the world. You may enjoy reading his book "Sailing Alone Around the World" (Century Company, New York).

You will find that the Standard Oil Company has been before you and established gasoline tanks pretty well up and down the South and Central American coast. Nearly all goods are landed in the South American ports by means of lighters, and these are largely gasoline propelled.

"Science of the Sea," by G. Herbert Fowler.

"Australia, Our Colonies and the Other Islands of the Sea," by F. G. Carpenter.

"Through the South Seas with Jack London," by Martin Johnson.

Any one of these books will give you the information you are looking for in regard to the islands of the South Seas.

Fox-Pelt Quotations

ASIDE from the information derived, the following correspondence shows you that if you don't get satisfaction from your first inquiry you can ask again, and the "Ask Adventure" expert is always willing to expand his original reply:

Question:—"Would you please inform me whether the black or silver fox is the most valuable, so we can settle a dispute."—Sto. John L. Glover, H. M. C. S. *Lansdowne.*

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Unless there has been a change in the market prices since last Spring there is no difference in the value.

Raw fur quotations last Spring ranged from $850 for No. 1 extra choice, to $5 for No. 4 regular—either black or silver.

Further Question:—"Yours of sixteenth to hand, for which I thank you. Being in a hurry the last time I wrote, I guess I did not state the case quite fully enough to receive the answer I require to settle the question. We are about equally divided here yet as to which is the most valuable with your letter before us. I do not know myself but from what I have read I claim the silver fox is always held as the most valuable and one or two others give good reasons why it is so, while others claim $1,000 for a black fox and that it always has been the most valuable, but do not put up as good arguments. So we would like for you to discuss this question at a little further length."—Sto. John L. Glover.

Answer, by Mr. Catton:—Values in furs, as well as in nearly everything else, are subject to supply and demand. And at present the demand for and the supply of black and silver foxes are divided about equally between the two; or to put it more plainly, there is as big a demand for black foxes as for silver, and about an equal number of both reach the markets annually.

In the London (England) markets both black and silver fox pelts have brought as high as twenty-five hundred dollars, while a good pair of black foxes for breeding purposes have been quoted as high as six thousand dollars. Also both black and silver foxes are found in the same litters, and a male black fox bred to a dark-red or cross fox will produce silver fox.

My own opinion is that there is but the one difference in the value between these two foxes—the difference of individual taste. Might just mention, by the way, that the silver-fox fur is not tipped, as seems to be the general opinion. It is silver barred, or ringed. Next the flesh the hair is black, then a bar of silver, and the black tip.

Send to *Rod and Gun in Canada* for "The Culture of Black and Silver Foxes," by R. B. and L. V. Croft, price sixty cents, postpaid.

LOST TRAILS

Note—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

ALLAN, HUGHIE V. Last heard of from Lockhart, Alabama. Any information regarding his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated.—Address C. Bravender, Wiggins, Mississippi.

TURNBULL, MRS. MARTHA. Widow with three children of Ezekiel Turnbull, who died in a tent on Cutty Creek, Muskogee, Okla., about eighteen years ago. Any information will be appreciated by her daughter.—Address Mrs. Tennessee Schneider, A. Oil Co., Section 29, Lost Hills, California.

ZEIBERT, FRED (Brother). Last heard of in Ohio about eight years ago. Age 47. Would greatly appreciate any information regarding him.—Address Rudolph Zeibert, 222 Seventh St., Jersey City, N. J.

KIRBY, WILLIE HOLBERT. Last heard of in Dallas, Texas, about four years ago. Reared in Buckner's Orphan Home, Dallas, Texas. He is about thirty years of age. Any information concerning him will be greatly appreciated by his sister.—Address Mrs. Jennie Tomlin, Station A, 109 Yarmouth St., Dallas, Texas.

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WATTS, JOHN E. A white American, was buried in Porto Rico by an Army chaplain on October fourth. Nothing known of his family. Further particulars can be had by addressing—MMN, care of *Adventure*.

ANDERSON, CARL or CHARLES. Born in Sweden about thirty years ago. Came to U. S. about fifteen years ago. Last heard from about two years ago, when he was then a chauffeur in New York. Any information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated.—Address D. JOHANSSON, Seamens Church Institute, 242 Stewart St., San Francisco, California.

MAGUIRE, GEORGE. Last heard of Montreal, Quebec. Joined the Canadian Army with an artillery battery a couple of years ago. Please write to your old friend.—Address LES SLATER, 688 Delorimier Ave., Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

Inquiries will be printed three times, then taken out. In the first February issue all unfound names asked for during the past two years will be printed alphabetically.

KING, G. E. Last heard of in Mississippi, probably in train service. If you see this, King, please drop me a card as to where to write you, would like to see you very much. (Am up to date.)—Address JOHN L. BEESON, Operator S. P. Co., Exeter, California.

PORTERFIELD, WELLINGTON; or Kelly, William. Age 45, was in Cambria, Wyoming, last heard from in Butte, Montana, two years after. Weight about 200 pounds height 5 feet 9 inches, brown hair, dark blue eyes. Occupation may be cheese-and-butter-maker, cook, etc. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address FRED PORTERFIELD, Box 16, Mitchell, Ont., Canada.

LEVALLEY, JEAN. Worked in Studebaker's plant No. 3. In Detroit, Michigan, during May and June. Boy write your Buddie.—Address R. S. CHROUCH ("Slim," or "Red"), 421 West Main St., Durand, Michigan.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SMITH, JACK. Last heard of somewhere in Canada. Any information regarding him will be appreciated.—Address CAPTAIN GEORGE ASH, care of American Consul, Shanghai, China.

CLASSANT, HENRI DE. About 55 or 60 years of age. Father thirty years ago big button manufacturer in Brussels. Brother Belgian military attaché in Washington. Henri intimate friend of Zola. Expatriated for political offense under Leopold. Magnificent barytone voice. Last seen in 1907 in dry wash north of Phoenix, Arizona, "go-walk country" as he expressed it.—Address Frank A. HUSTON, care of *Adventure*.

HACKETT, CLYDE O. U. S. Naval Base Hospital, Unit No. 3, care of Postmaster, N. Y., N. Y. To my old pal—"Let me hear from you."—Address HARRY ROGERS, 1545 Ashland Ave., Indianapolis, Ind.

BERGSTROM, ALBIN. Swede, about 28 years old, medium height, strongly built, dark hair. Arrived in Calobbe, Colosso, Chile, South America, in 1914, aboard the Norwegian sailing-vessel *Fairport*. Any information concerning him will be appreciated.—Address D. JOHANSSON, Seamens Church Institute, 242 Stewart St., San Francisco, California.

MALONE, DAN C. Please write your old partner of Bisbee, Alabama.—Address A. L. FITZGERALD, care of *Adventure*.

CLARKE, JAMES. Lived at 619 Tower St., Fall River, Mass. Was last heard of in Walla Walla, Washington, in 1900. About forty years of age, fair complexion and medium height. Any information will be greatly appreciated by his sister.—Address ELLA DOHERTY, Lancaster Hotel, Denver, Colorado.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

KELLY, ROBERT E. Last heard from aboard U. S. Dredge *Guadalupe* in April 1917 at Galveston, Texas. Write your old friend at home address.—A. L. BATES, 109 N. Walnut St., DuQuoin, Ill.

FISHER, JOE. Electrician, worked in Dept. 32 Dodge Bros., Detroit, Michigan, this Summer. Boy write your Buddie.—Address R. S. CHROUCH ("Slim," or "Red"), 421 West Main St., Durand, Michigan.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the First-February or Mid-February issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

BAKER, R. W.; Bradt, Charles Edwin; Carlson, Nels; Hughes, Wm. P.; King, Sergt. F. W.; Lorntzen, Chris, Lewis, Beny; Love, Mrs. Marie, Violet and Daisy; McMurry, Mrs.; Mosher, Hugh; Roberts, Ora Frank; Rutherford, John, Emma, Lena; Wood, Sarah; Schelp, Roy E.; Von Hacht, William, (Don W. Smith); Walker, Rupert H.; Wilson, Clarence; Wood, Beverly.

MANUSCRIPTS UNCLAIMED

HASTLAR GAL BREATH, Ruth Gilfillan, Lee Hays; Jack P. Robinson; Ray Ozmer; Miss Jimmie Banks; Wm. Tien Tang; O. B. Franklin; Cole Williams.

PLEASE send us your present address. Letters forwarded to you at address given us do not reach you.—Address J. E. Cox, care *Adventure*.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MID-MARCH ADVENTURE

Beside the three mentioned in the ad on the second page, nine stories of adventure on land and sea come to you in the Mid-March number, on the stands February 18th.

TWO FIGHTING MEN — *By H. Keith Trask*
Over many leagues of sea water goes the long search.

THE GLORIOUS HOLIDAY — *By Jack Bechdolt*
When the weary lumberjack craves an hour of rest, the calendar may prove an unexpected friend.

THE DANCE OF THE GOLDEN GODS — *By Stephen Chalmers*
Wherein *Dickon Bulshead* comes to the end of his wanderings.

THE PAYMENT — *By D. Wiggins*
One night's lodging for man and beast—how much is it worth?

CHIVALRY — *By Gordon Young*
In the slums of San Francisco plumed knights are never seen. But you may find real men there.

THE STRONGER BOND — *By William H. Pope*
Not all the problems of a feud are to be solved by powder and lead.

THE PIEBALD — *By Atreus von Schrader*
She was mean and vicious, this piebald horse, but a Texas trooper loved her.

ON THE WINGS OF THE MORNING — *By William M. McCoy*
A story of justice in the Topa Topa country.

PAYING HIS DEBT — *E. E. Harriman*
Which shows how an obligation incurred in the Luzon jungle may be settled years later and far away.

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She Had Called Him Beast!

She had first seen him drunk beneath the azalea bush—the lady that Red Gulch called "stuck up."

Then came the painted woman with her dreadful secret. And then—but the heart of a woman is strange.

Read this tangled romance with its astonishing ending. It is one of the never-to-be-forgotten stories of the real West told by

BRET HARTE

141 Brilliant, World-Famous Stories

Gamblers, adventurers, outcasts, Harvard graduates, cowboys, miners, wonderfully good women and hopelessly bad women, ex-bankers, ex-judges, ex-colonels, ex-convicts—all sorts and conditions of men, drawn by the lure of gold, pass in endless procession before your eyes—all the things that build the fires of life and send the red blood pulsing, are in his pages.

Never was romance so mingled with everyday life—never was life so full of surprises, of galloping adventures. With his pen—as by a miracle—Bret Harte has caught it and set it down.

He is the spirit given by the Great West to tell the world of the amazing dramas of its heart. *He is the only one who has ever done it.* Others have tried it—they are but his imitators. No one has ever compared with him in doing it. If you do not know Bret Harte, you do not know the West. If you do not know him, you have missed the treasure house of American literature.

Being a true American, he hates whatever is dull, and he has kept it out of his books. Every page stands out a vital part of a gripping story. Every story tells an unforgettable tale of love and ambition and human sacrifice. Read him—see for yourself the enchanting spell of the West. Remember, until you have read Bret Harte, you do not know it. Mail the coupon to-day and be glad.

A Bargain We Pass On to You

As you know, the price of paper has gone up. But by good fortune we have left a small remnant of an edition of Bret Harte that was made when paper was cheaper. While these sets last, you can have them at or below the old price.

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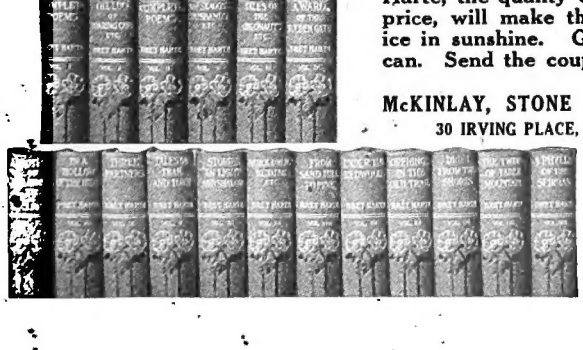
In 18 volumes, beautifully made, handsomely bound, these sets are a treasure at any price—and now that you have a chance to get them at so small a cost, don't miss your chance. Send the coupon at once for the whole set—on approval. Send them back at our expense if they're not more than you expect. The fame of Bret Harte, the quality of the books, the low price, will make these books vanish as ice in sunshine. Get yours while you can. Send the coupon—now—to-day.



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